

RIVERSIDE HOUSING CONGESTION

A Pilot Study of Housing in a Community in  
the Borough of Manhattan, New York City

By Walter Thabit, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Master of City Planning, May 25, 1953.

Signed: Professor Frederick J. Adams  
Department of City Planning

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

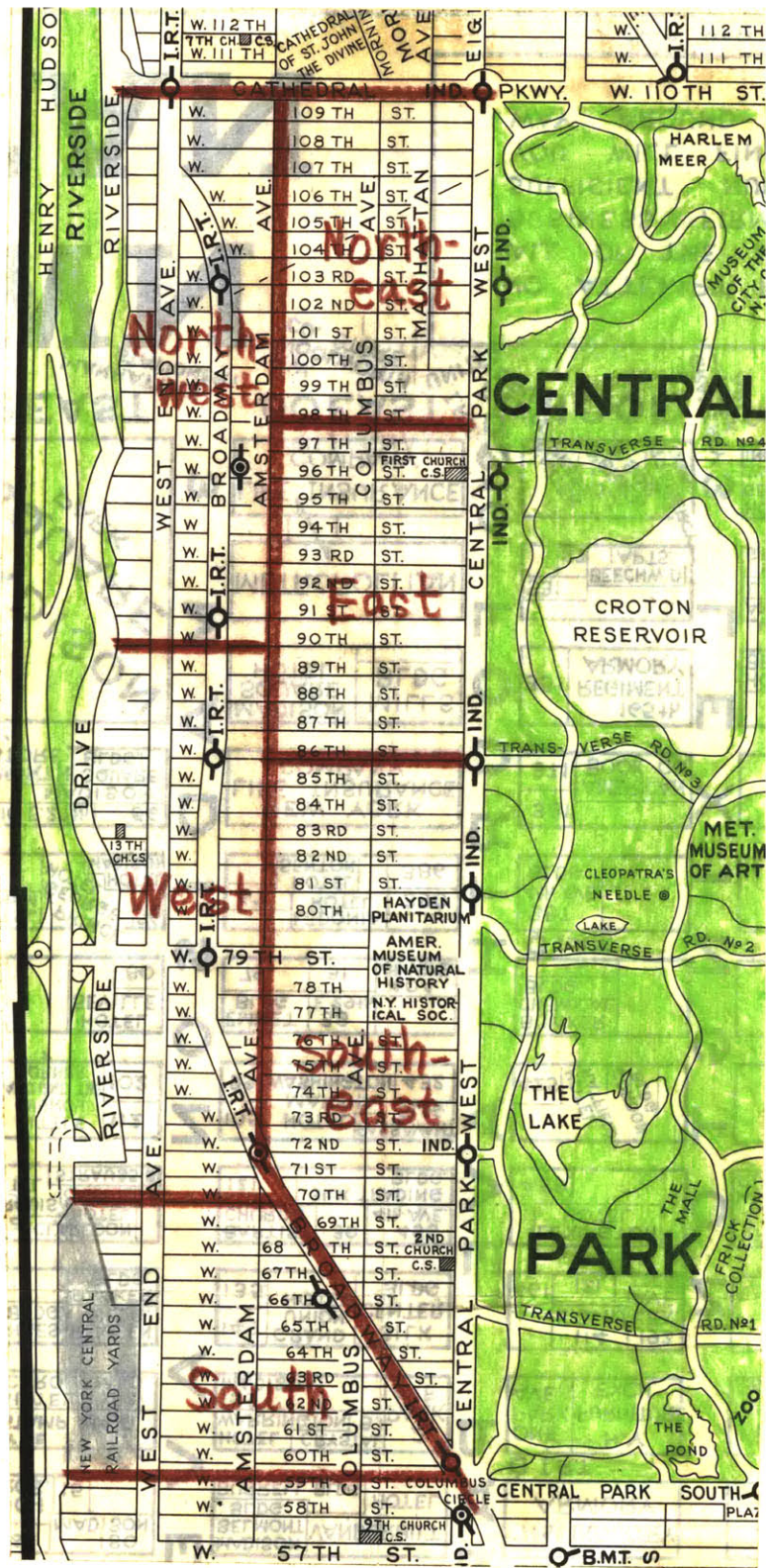
Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Arch. - Nov. 10, 1953

N



RIVERSIDE

33

## ABSTRACT

### RIVERSIDE HOUSING CONGESTION

A Pilot Study of Housing in a Community in the Borough of Manhattan, New York City.

Submitted to the Department of City & Regional Planning on May 25, 1953 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of City Planning.

---

The study of a high density area such as Riverside is undertaken with its maintenance as an adequate residential area the end in view. In order to maintain such areas, certain things about the population, the dwellings, and the community facilities must be learned.

Riverside is an area with a constantly increasing population. This increase results from heavy pressures for housing by many types of New Yorkers who for one reason or another desire accommodations which are convenient to the heart of the city. Low income groups are forced to live in high density areas. One and two person households like being close to work, recreation, and shopping. These increases however, tend to be made at the expense of the middle income family with children. They are made at the expense of adequate dwellings, at the danger of creating unsatisfactory living conditions for all residents.

Brownstones, originally built for family life, are now used by single persons and couples. Elevator apartment houses, once built for the family with children to take the place of brownstones are being increasingly used by adult families. Low income groups are getting an increasingly large share of Riverside because of its loss of desirability as a place to live.

The same situation pertains to the use of community facilities. Here, the problem is one of the long term use of a location for a facility such as a church or a school which stays in a changing area and is no longer available to certain groups. Church or school in a low income area is not acceptable to the middle income group. Increased population makes it possible for community facilities to be further dispersed so they will be more available, but space allotted to such facilities is rigid and the facilities cannot be moved. Facilities are not where they can be used by people.

Planning is the best answer. This sort of study should be made to determine the extent of congestion and its forms, and then an objective set of alternatives can be presented to citizens for a policy decision. Citizens themselves are too involved to make the objective studies required.

---

Thesis Supervisor: Frederick J. Adams, Professor of City Planning

WALTER THABIT

374 - 7TH STREET

BROOKLYN 15, N. Y.

TEL. STERLING 8-3461

May 25, 1953

Frederick J. Adams, Head  
Department of City & Regional Planning  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge 39, Massachusetts

Dear Professor Adams:

Enclosed find my thesis entitled "Riverside Housing Congestion" submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of City Planning. Its submission brings to a close at least this period of my formal planning education.

It has been my privilege to receive one of the best courses of training in city planning in the United States and possibly in the world. For this, I shall always be indebted to the Planning Department staff.

Though as a planner it will be my lot to be considered an "expert" on the nature of land use problems, it is becoming increasingly evident that we "experts" have exceptionally limited knowledge. As the years pass, it will be my most ardent wish to become more learned, and for the profession to become a truly expert one.

Respectfully,



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

PREFATORY NOTE

INTRODUCTION: THE RIVERSIDE STORY . . . . . 1

I. THE RIVERSIDE POPULATION . . . . . 12

II. DWELLING CONGESTION IN RIVERSIDE . . . . . 37

III. CONGESTION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES . . . . . 62

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RIVERSIDE . . . . . 77

### PREFATORY NOTE

The principal sources used in this study are the reports and archives of the New York Chapter, American Institute of Architects, Committee on Housing. They were made available through the courtesy of the Committee and, in particular, its Chairman, Mr. Henry S. Churchill. This writer had the pleasure to direct the research of its current probe into the patterns of urban congestion. Most references are therefore made to this study, and are referred to as: AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion".

Since this study was based primarily on census data and original research, no bibliography is included.

Thanks to a suggestion by Professor Howard, the reader can follow the paper more easily by opening the last page of the report exposing a map of the Riverside area.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE RIVERSIDE STORY

The story of Riverside is an old one. It or its counterpart has been told many times. Sometimes a feature writer for a large daily newspaper would write about the Bowery. About the old days when it was fashionable, when carriages paraded up and down the wide street, when children played respectably on the sidewalks. Invariably a tintype or an old engraving would accompany his story showing upper middle class matrons walking along chatting gaily, the houses in the background placing them irretrievably in upper middle class society. And this picture would be contrasted with today's flophouses, bars and saloons, and the social and physical wrecks littering the sidewalks.

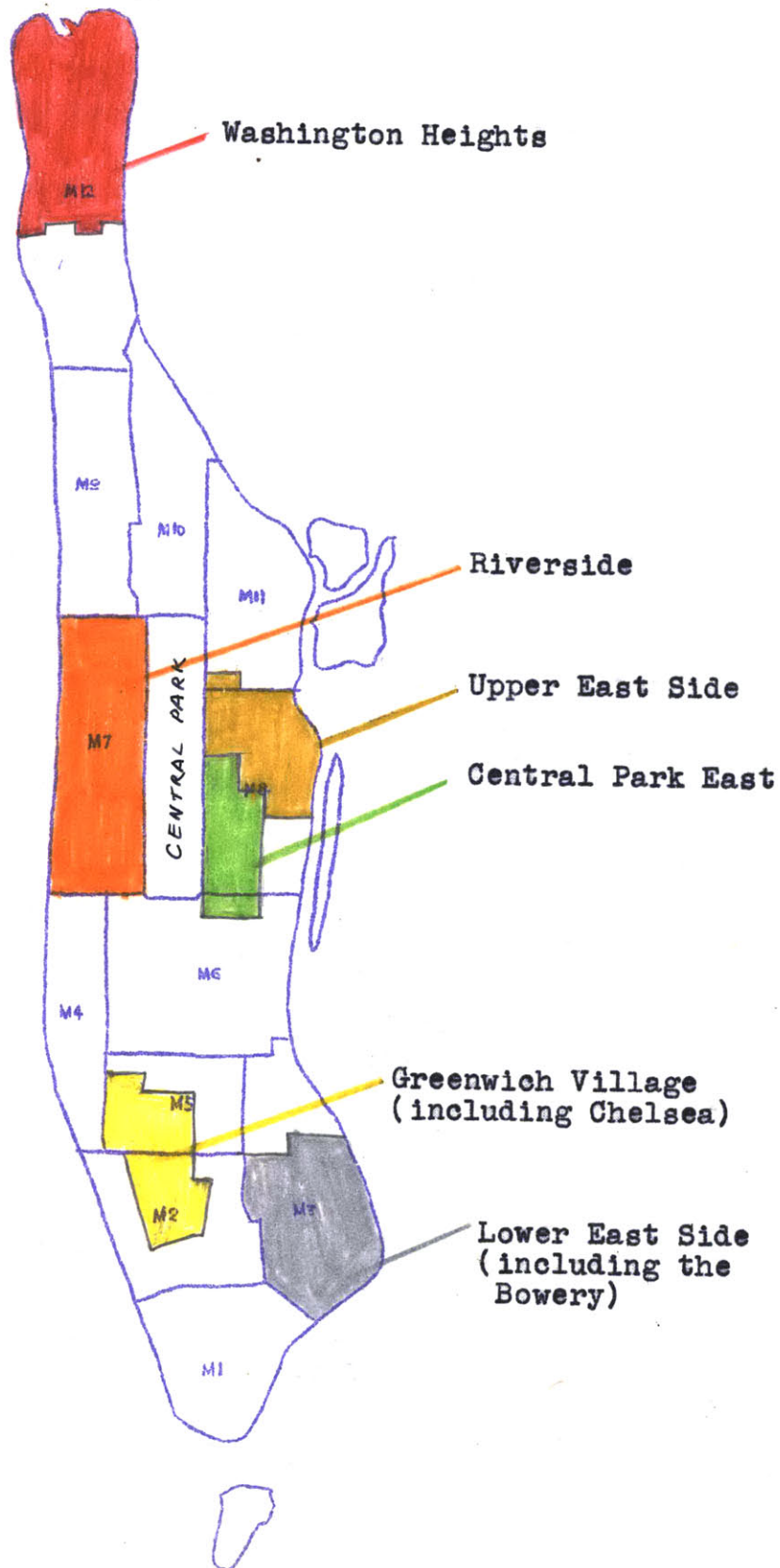
Greenwich Village, the lower East Side, Chelsea, and the St. Marks area, have all been written up (See Figure 1 on page 2). The story is always the same. From a field with a decrepit house the only structure as far as the eye could see, a fashionable neighborhood was born. Only the best people lived there. And now it was a slum, or breathing its last gasp of respectability.

The old inhabitants, the wealthy, we are told, have long since moved to Park Avenue or Tuxedo Park where they live a life of luxury and quiet. They explain how this neigh-

## LOCATION OF AREAS IN MANHATTAN

FIGURE I

Showing some different types of  
relatively homogeneous areas  
1910 - 1950



borhood or that went down the road to ruin because of increased population, increased traffic, and the spread of commercial areas. There can be no quarrel with all this. The aim of the present story, however, is to discover the nature of the tremendous forces of decline.

No one wants a fine residential area to deteriorate. The rich who built mansions certainly don't. Real estate agents are against any change that deteriorates values. High grade investors want their buildings to remain profitable forever. Tenants want to see their community remain desirable. But nevertheless it declines. How does it happen when nobody wants it to happen? That is the question which has stumped the experts.

In Riverside, the frustrating experience has already begun. Real estate interests fight to maintain the quality of building services, to keep up appearances. Right next door, someone rents rooms to a prostitute. He tries to make sure that only the best class of tenant is in possession. But his best tenants start renting rooms to lodgers. Pitifully, an agent describes how carefully he has refrained from extensive conversion in his buildings; across the street a six story building is being converted to one room apartments.

Some upper income groups have already moved away. Middle



income groups of certain types are also on the way out. Low income families are more and more in evidence. Population rises inexorably. Stores become more crowded, schools get older, churches lose attendance. Values continue to drop. Less desirable tenants move into the best buildings. Whole sections are losing status.

This is a problem which puts planners, real estate interests, architects and builders on a hot spot. It is so hot that they have to "pass the buck". For the real estate interests, low income groups are the real cause of slums. Investors retire their investments from threatened communities to more desirable areas. Planners and architects, with nothing better to offer, blandly suggest tearing everything down and beginning again. The tenant is the continual loser in this game; nobody has taken the trouble to find out how to stop the spreading blight.

This paper will explore some new ways of looking at Riverside which may be helpful. As its population rises, changes in the characteristics of the population take place. As apartment houses replace brownstones, changes in the way of dwelling take place. Have these changes affected shopping, education, recreation, the way of life of Riversiders? How have the new elevator apartments affected the lives of tenants, and what effect have they had on the remaining brownstones?

This is a story about an area which is declining. It attempts to point out a few of the real consequences of population rise, of new development, and of changing community needs. More than anything else, this story will try to show how interrelated the various elements of housing are, and how in the process of change, the adjustments made may have serious consequences for living.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hundreds of thousands of people live in the Riverside area. They live in elevator apartment houses as high as eighteen stories, and in small houses as low as three stories. Transportation, shopping, churches, schools, and recreation areas are close at hand. It is bordered on the West by Riverside Park and the Hudson River, and on the East by New York's famous Central Park (see Figure 1 on page 2).

There are all sorts of people in Riverside. Families with children, aged persons, young people going to school, actors, dancers, business men, lawyers, doctors, and a multitude of workers. There are more one and two person households than of any other type; the number of large families have been on the decline for a long time. Puerto Ricans are moving in at a rapid rate. There are many Catholics, Jews, refugees, negroes (in some parts), Protestants (though many

of the upper income group have left), and all sorts of others. It is a very mixed kind of community. A thumb-nail sketch of various sections of Riverside is given in Figure 2 on the next page.

As has been intimated, the housing is of various kinds. Upper income families live in elevator apartments; low income families live in dumbbell tenements.<sup>1</sup> Elevator apartments range from the best types with luxurious appointments to those built expressly for the middle income groups.

- 
1. While it doesn't seem possible that anyone who hopes to understand this paper could do so without knowing what a brownstone is like, it may be worthwhile to give a few definitions of some dwelling types as they are used in this paper.

**Brownstone:** A dwelling of three, four, or five stories in height with a frontage of between 17.5 and 25 feet. Its main feature is a staircase on one side of the house which restricts the way in which it can be converted to one apartment facing the front and one apartment facing the back of the house. Such a building may have been built for either single family or multiple family dwelling.

**Dumbbell or old-law tenement:** A dwelling generally of four or five stories with a frontage almost always of 25 feet. It has a central staircase with apartments on both sides allowing four apartments to be put on a floor. It is known as a dumbbell because of its shape; it has light and air corridors on each side of the house giving it the look of a capital H on its side. These are extremely high density dwellings.

**Elevator apartment or Apartment House:** These buildings are all equipped with elevators and range in height from six to eighteen stories. They can be luxurious or built to minimum standards. Almost all such buildings were constructed after 1901. They vary in width from 25 to 200 feet; the average frontage is about 75 to 125 feet in width.

## THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF RIVERSIDE SUB-AREAS

FIGURE 2

The Northwest area: Though it has good housing, it is not as desirable for tenants as areas (1), (2), and (3). Shopping is adequate, transportation is excellent. Is close to area (5), where Puerto Ricans are; tenants fear inundation and mistreatment.

The Northeast area: The worst types of high density old-law tenements can be found in this section. Density is very high, always has been. Part of area is scheduled for redevelopment and public housing. Usual problems of overcrowding, Many negroes and Puerto Ricans.

The West area: Is one of best areas, lowest density with excellent housing, shopping, and transportation. Riverside Drive has excellent apartment houses. Its housing is good all the way from Amsterdam Avenue to Riverside Drive.

The East area: Dwellings are mixed good and bad. Most is not bad, but substantial number of old-law tenements. Not as many elevator buildings as in best areas.

The South area: low income area, many industrial nuisances such as storage tanks, garages, and the like. Housing is poor, as are the conditions of the people. Least desirable area of all.

The Southeast area: Most desirable of all. Apartment houses along Central Park West are among finest in the City. But many brownstones and converted apartments are in use by transients, students, and white collar types. Is therefore called the transient area since upper income living is not main emphasis of study.



NOTE: Areas of Riverside described and named for future reference in this paper. Numbered in order of desirability for tenants. Based on survey of five real estate concerns in the Riverside area.<sup>1</sup>

1. For full discussion see AIA "patterns of Urban Congestion" archives.

Walkups run the gamut from mansions built for millionaires through dumbbell types built expressly for low income groups.

Though Central Park borders Riverside on the East and Riverside Park borders it on the West, it would be difficult to describe the area as having sufficient park space. Similarly, though it has multitudes of shops, it is difficult to say that shopping facilities are adequate. Its transportation is excellent being served by two subways, and it is close to the heart of the city which is an advantage. Its streets are crowded, many are dirty because of continuous parking. They are not reminiscent of a quiet residential area of the past.

When these elements of people, dwellings, and community facilities are put together, a picture results in which everything is in the wrong place. Things are not where they should be or where people want them. Families with children cannot do the kind of living they want. Tenants in apartment houses want to be somewhere else. The housing is there, the facilities are there, and the people are there, yet the feeling persists that desirable facilities are out of the reach of many people.

The people who live in the houses and use the facilities in the area are not especially happy. Least happy are



those in the upper and middle income groups who have been moving out. They say community facilities are excellent, but they are afraid to go out at night. Landlords and real estate men complain that no matter what they do to keep up the area, some other landlords seem to be doing everything possible to tear it down. Thousands of people live in Riverside, but many complain of the few friends they have in the area. There are hundreds of thousands of people in the area, but not one decent restaurant.

Starvation in the midst of plenty. An area naturally endowed with tremendous advantages of transportation, closeness to the heart of the city, a large shopping area, and a large share of excellent housing, is in danger of losing its desirability.

Our story is about the unsatisfactory relation of tenants to their dwellings and their community facilities. We shall try to show that a re-ordering is an absolute necessity, that simply building better dwellings or adding a high school will not suffice. It is not simply a lack of facilities, but a strong possibility that facilities which do exist are being used so inefficiently as to be dangerous to the welfare of the community.

Our purpose is to develop the possibility of the reality of the hypothesis, and not to prove the case. Enough

stimulation must be given so that the necessary studies will be undertaken. Then, it can be left to architects, planners, builders, and investors to see what can be done about lengthening the useful life of the Riverside area.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following acknowledgments are to those most helpful in various aspects of this research. Many others have given their time and energy. Their assistance is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

To the New York Chapter, American Institute of Architects, "Committee on Housing" for underwriting most of the research used as a basis for this paper.

To its Chairman, Henry S. Churchill, who inspired the broad approach to the subject of congestion, who was sceptical of unfounded conclusions, whose understanding of the subject was a challenge, and who left me alone to work.

To Professors Frederick J. Adams, Roland B. Greeley, Jack Howard, and Lloyd Rodwin for being compassionate and exacting guides throughout the period of research.

To Charles Abrams for his continued interest, encouragement, and pointed discussions of the problem.

To Dr. Jane Schick who prepared the original questionnaire and trained the first interviewers. To the first interviewers, Miss Rita Edelman, Miss Marilyn Margolis, Miss June Raughter, and Miss Thelma Radzivil.

To my friends, Sanford Greenfield, Pares Bhattachargi, David Pellish, and Wally Rutes, who incited me to more clear and meaningful goals.

To the part time staff with which I worked, including Mrs. Arlene Kohn, Janet Scheff, and Morris Weitman.

To the AAA Committee on Housing for their help and discussions of the extremely difficult problems involved in this research. They include Alan Burham, John Callander, G. Harmon Gurney, John Rannels, Frank Lopez, William Vladeck.

To the Staff of the New York City Planning Department, and in particular to Mr. Henry Cohen, Mr. Sam Joroff, and Mr. Sy Schulman, and others who participated in discussions. Many materials and maps were made available for the study.

To the Welfare Council of New York, and Miss Florence Cuttrell who made space, census data, and council available to us.

**Movement Studies:**

Mr. G. Harmon Gurney was most helpful in establishing contacts; Mr. James J. Boyle for assistance with Fresh Meadows; Mr. Charles H. Huebner in connection with a famous downtown project; Mr. Westfield of Manhattan House; Mr. Greenthal of Schwab House; Mr. Fiske of the 63rd St. YMCA; Mr. Fialkin of the NYCHA for records of housing projects, and his helpful discussions.

To Mr. Walter Sperry, of Wood-Dolson & Co., for his continuous time and effort to help properly orient this study of Riverside.

To Mr. Herbert Sternau, Riverside Civic Leader, and very good comrade during the period of this research. His insight and interest spurred the research into many unique areas.

To Miss Nora Zarick who typed the report under heavy pressure.

## CHAPTER I

## THE RIVERSIDE POPULATION

Population is the most important variable in the study of housing. It is not fixed like a church or an apartment house. The numbers of people can increase and decrease with relative ease in a short time. Family types can change with equal facility. But the houses in which they live, and the stores in which they shop, remain pretty much the same. For this reason, an understanding of the changing characteristics of the Riverside population is essential to an effective study of housing.

In general, because of the data made available by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, some data on population is fairly easy to get. Its size, the rate of its growth, some of its characteristics, and its distribution in any area is available. Little, however, is known about the shifts of population. Where do the people come from? Where do they go when they leave? Which family types are involved in such shifts?

These questions are of vital importance to housing. If it was known which types of households were coming to Riverside, which types were leaving, it might be possible to understand shifts in the making, even to accurately predict, and prepare for the situation. Without this

information (in a rapidly changing area such as Riverside), planners, architects, and builders are hard pressed to justify their proposals; the communities would be (as Riverside is) at the mercy of the changing population.

To the extent possible, the pressures and elements which may be involved in Riverside's population growth and shifts are explained in this chapter. "Making do" with what could be squeezed from various sources, the attempt has been made to develop a reasonable picture of its growth and change.

Population growth of Manhattan areas:

Riverside is not an isolated community, but a part of Manhattan and New York City. And the fact that Riverside's population has almost doubled in the past fifty years despite the fact that Manhattan has lost population between 1910 and 1950 has definite implications.<sup>1</sup> That simple fact helps to trace the most powerful forces affecting Riverside population. For while Manhattan population fell from 2,330,000 in 1910 to 1,960,000 in 1950, some parts were losing population, and some, like Riverside were gaining steadily.<sup>2</sup> A picture of the shifting of population density in Manhattan is shown in Figure 3 on page 14.

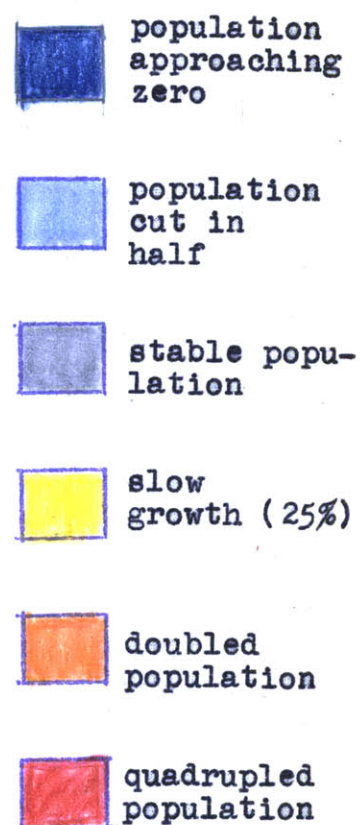
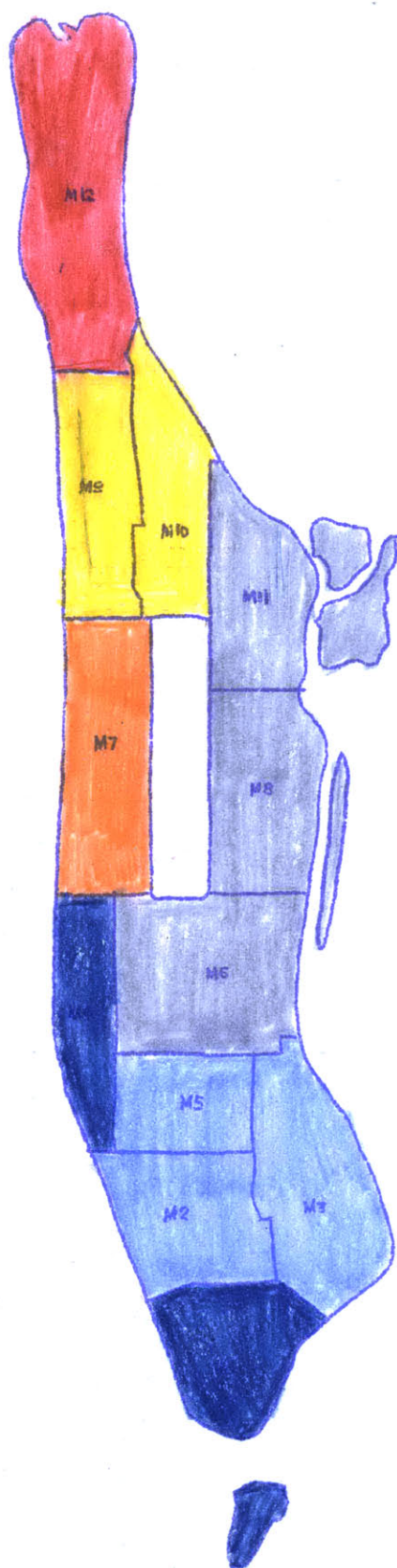
- 
1. All data compiled in this chapter comes from either of two sources: The appropriate U.S. Bureau of Census reports, and "Population of New York City 1790-1930" edited by Walter Laidlaw. This latter source was particularly helpful in the study of patterns of growth, both because of the given data and thoughtful formulations on congestion by Mr. Laidlaw.



RATES OF GROWTH IN STATISTICAL DISTRICTS  
OF MANHATTAN FROM 1910 TO 1950.

FIGURE 3

Compiled from U.S. Census, and  
"Population of New York City,  
1790 - 1930".



The forces at work are best described through direct quotation from the AIA Committee on Housing analysis of population growth of Manhattan:<sup>3</sup>

The rise of population growth in Manhattan follows a pattern not unlike that of a tidal wave. First there was a mounting pressure below Canal Street to densities far in excess of a thousand persons per acre. As people continued to pour into the city, the dam broke with a tremendous roar. Population, old and new, streamed Northward.

Successively, the areas of the Lower East Side, the Lower West Side (bypassing Greenwich Village), Midtown, both East and West, and the upper East Side succumbed to the pressure of the population wave.

Upper income owners and tenants deserted area after area in the face of the waves of population. Their homes and apartments were taken over by unscrupulous landlords who rented all kinds of available space to the multitudes demanding it. Services broke down, buildings deteriorated, areas became blighted. The growth of the commercial structure in Manhattan devoured housing as rapidly as unlimited tenancy....

....United and desperate efforts to raise standards in 1910 were too late to effect a markedly increased standard of living for the majority of persons. Shelter, built as an expression of the apparently unlimi-

- 
2. (from preceeding page) Manhattan population for the years 1910 to 1950 are as follows:

1910	-	2,331,452
1920	-	2,284,103
1930	-	1,867,312
1940	--	1,889,924
1950	-	1,960,101

3. AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion" Reports.

ted demand for valuable space, is found throughout New York City....

The waves of population came, settled for a time in whatever was built, and then moved on to better and less congested quarters. Our slums were built as permanent monuments to a temporary (though tremendous) pressure. As temporary accommodations, no better type than dumbbell could be designed, but it has turned into a permanent dwelling for hundreds of thousands....

....pressure for housing, the population wave which exploded in the 1850's, continues on a decreasing scale. The areas around Central Park, the Riverside area, Morningside Heights, and all parts North of 155th St., are still experiencing steady increases of population. The newest in-migrants, negroes and Puerto Ricans, in addition to the residue of doubled and tripled up families from other migrations, continue to exert extreme pressure outward from their traditional high density ghettos toward the areas of less congestion."

The above passages need no further explanation. But to clarify the position of Riverside in relation to other areas in Manhattan, a short description of the growth pattern (1910 - 1950) of different types of areas may be helpful. (Location of these areas are found in Figure 1, page 2):<sup>1</sup>

1. An area such as the Lower East Side, an old, well

---

1. This summary is taken from AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion" Reports.

High density, in this paper, is defined as being between 250 and 350 persons per gross acre. Low density is defined as being between 100 and 150 persons per gross acre. Mixed density implies that some census tracts in an area will be of low density, others of medium density, and still others of high density.

recognized slum area. Though still densely populated, it has lost almost half its population since 1910.

2. Greenwich Village is densely populated in some parts, but has relatively low density in others. It is not a slum, but parts are badly deteriorating. It has had gradual losses of population.
3. An area such as the Upper East Side which is simply overcrowded, but whose population grows slowly if at all. Generally a low income, rapidly deteriorating area.
4. An area such as Central Park East which also grows slowly if at all, yet is a low density area. The most desirable type of area in New York City.
5. High population increase areas which are densely populated like Riverside. These areas are dangerously close to overcrowding and deterioration.
6. The final type is typified by Washington Heights. Some tracts of high density and some of low density, but an overall high rate of population increase between 1910 and 1950.

At this point, the question may well be raised, "Why did Central Park East not succumb to this tremendous population pressure?". It is a question well worth considering. The answer to it may give some indication of the method for resisting forces that tend to deteriorate Riverside.<sup>1</sup>

- 
1. Two answers are among the possible ones: First, it may be that dwelling types differ markedly from those existing in Riverside. Perhaps the original single family houses in the area are not mostly four stories as they are in Riverside. They may be three, and this might well make the difference between finding life in a single family house possible and desirable to convert. Second, perhaps there was a difference in the time when each area was developed. There is a possibility that Riverside came to maturity as an area before Central Park East in which case that area may suffer the same fate as Riverside.

This whole problem should be subjected to more study.

Riverside, however has yielded to these pressures. Still further population increases can be expected for Riverside. The Northward movement of population, the decrowding of Southern Manhattan in the late 1800's, is still going on. This general pressure is being constantly reinforced by new immigrations. Riverside has yielded to these movements with marked effects on its population composition.

Effect of population increase in Riverside:

Most of the increase in Riverside population has been in the areas of best available dwelling. The distribution of the increases is clearly shown in Figure 4 on page 19.<sup>1</sup> In the areas labeled Southeast, West, and Northwest, population increased by 210%. In the areas labeled East, Northeast, and South, the increase was only 11%. The desire on the part of those moving into Riverside is clearly for accommodation in the areas of better housing. Areas of less desirable housing do not attract population increases to any great extent.

Population increases can be related to the decline of Riverside. Doubling of the population imposes a heavy load on the capacity of better areas to house the increased number of people. But that is not all. As the population increases, the changes in the type of family being housed occur, and new needs have to be met with the same housing facilities.

Among the most important changes in Riverside have been the

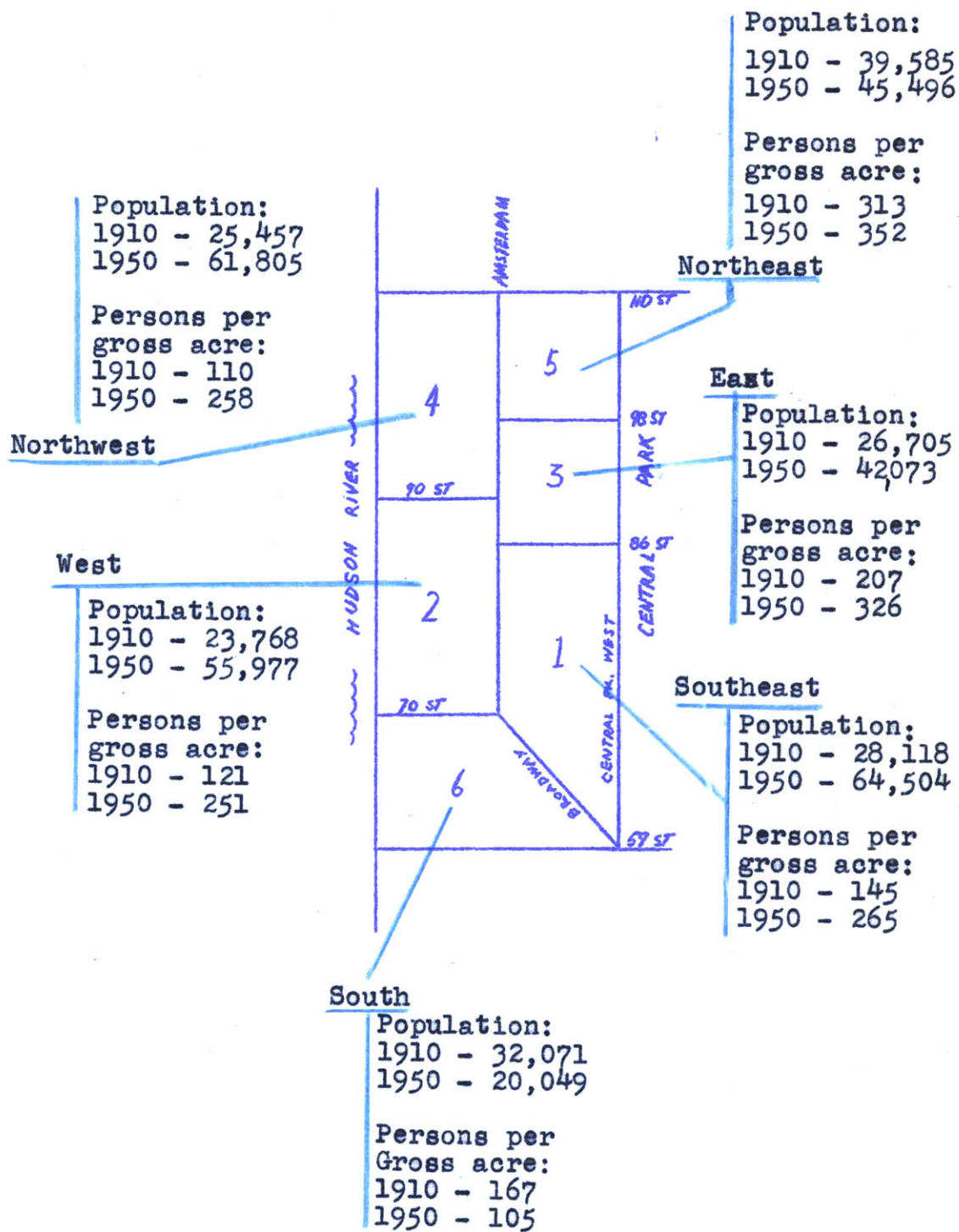
---

1. Growth patterns are steady, but show small signs of leveling off in twenty years or so.



POPULATION GROWTH BY SECTIONS  
IN RIVERSIDE 1910 - 1950

FIGURE 4



considerable increase in one and two person households, and an even greater increase in the number of persons over 45 years of age. Conversely, there has been a large drop in the number of large families, and in the number of persons between 15 and 44 years of age. Figure 5 on page 21 gives the percentage changes in the age and household size distributions.

Since 1930 (the first census for which household size by census tract is available) , the percentage of single and two person families in areas of better housing climbed 12%.<sup>1</sup> In less desirable areas, the increases do not occur or are smaller. The tendency for a change in age distribution is also greater in the better areas than in the poorer ones. The number of persons over 45 years of age, for example, has increased by 18% in the better areas as against an increase of 7% in the poorer ones.

The major effects of changed population characteristics is, therefore limited quite naturally to the areas of better housing, the Southeast, West, and Northwest areas.<sup>2</sup> Few

- 
1. For household size by census tracts in 1930, we are indebted to Miss Florence Cuttrell and the Welfare Council of New York from whose dusty files they emerged.
  2. Since no drastic changes are taking place in the Northeast and South areas, ie; no change in household size or age distribution, there is no point in discussing them here. Since the population does not change drastically, overcrowding is the only additional burden on these areas. They are areas of sub-standard housing, they are both pro-

PERCENT CHANGE IN AGE (1920 -1950) AND  
HOUSEHOLD SIZE (1930 - 1950) IN RIVERSIDE.

FIGURE 5

Note: All figures given are percents of total population.

RIVERSIDE SECTIONS			South-east	East	West	North-west	North-east	South
A G E	0 -14	1920	9.7	14.5	11.5	12.8	20.5	26.4
		1950	8.1	12.9	9.2	10.0	20.9	23.9
		%change	- 1.6	- 1.6	- 2.3	- 2.8	+ 0.4	- 2.5
	15-44	1920	58.5	57.4	59.0	58.6	56.4	55.9
		1950	41.1	46.5	43.0	42.1	46.4	48.8
		% change	-17.4	-10.9	-16.0	-16.5	-10.0	- 7.1
	45 +	1920	31.3	27.8	29.2	28.1	22.9	16.9
		1950	46.9	40.5	47.1	47.7	32.6	29.7
		% change	+15.9	+12.7	+17.9	+19.6	+ 9.7	+12.8
percent of one and two person households	1930	59.	48.	55.	47.	43.	52.	
	1950	71.	60.	67.	51.*	34.*	55.	
	% change	+12.	+12.	+12.	+ 4.	- 9.	+ 3.	

Note: Starred ( \* ) figures. These percentages are likely to be misleading. Two tracts in each of the areas affected are atypical in 1950 in respect to household size; leaving out the offending tracts, the following is had:

Northwest, 60.  
Northeast, 42.

marked shifts in age distribution or household size in the less desirable areas. Population shifts are occurring in the areas of good housing, in the areas we would like to maintain as adequate dwelling areas.

There is one exception to the generally small amount of change in the poorer areas which is important to consider. Puerto Ricans in large numbers are moving into Riverside, largely into the Northeast area. As much as 29% of the population in one of the census tracts is Puerto Rican. This is a major shift in an ethnic sense, and has an effect on the use of housing.<sup>1</sup> Puerto Ricans are also entering the Northwest and East areas in some numbers. Figure 6 on page 23 shows the percentage of Puerto Ricans in 1950 in Riverside.

It is necessary to consider this Puerto Rican immigration in order to point up an important aspect of the changing population picture in the better areas. The first Puerto

- 
2. (continued) posed as sub-standard areas by current NYC Planning Commission proposals for Master Plan map changes. This is not a study of sub-standard conditions.

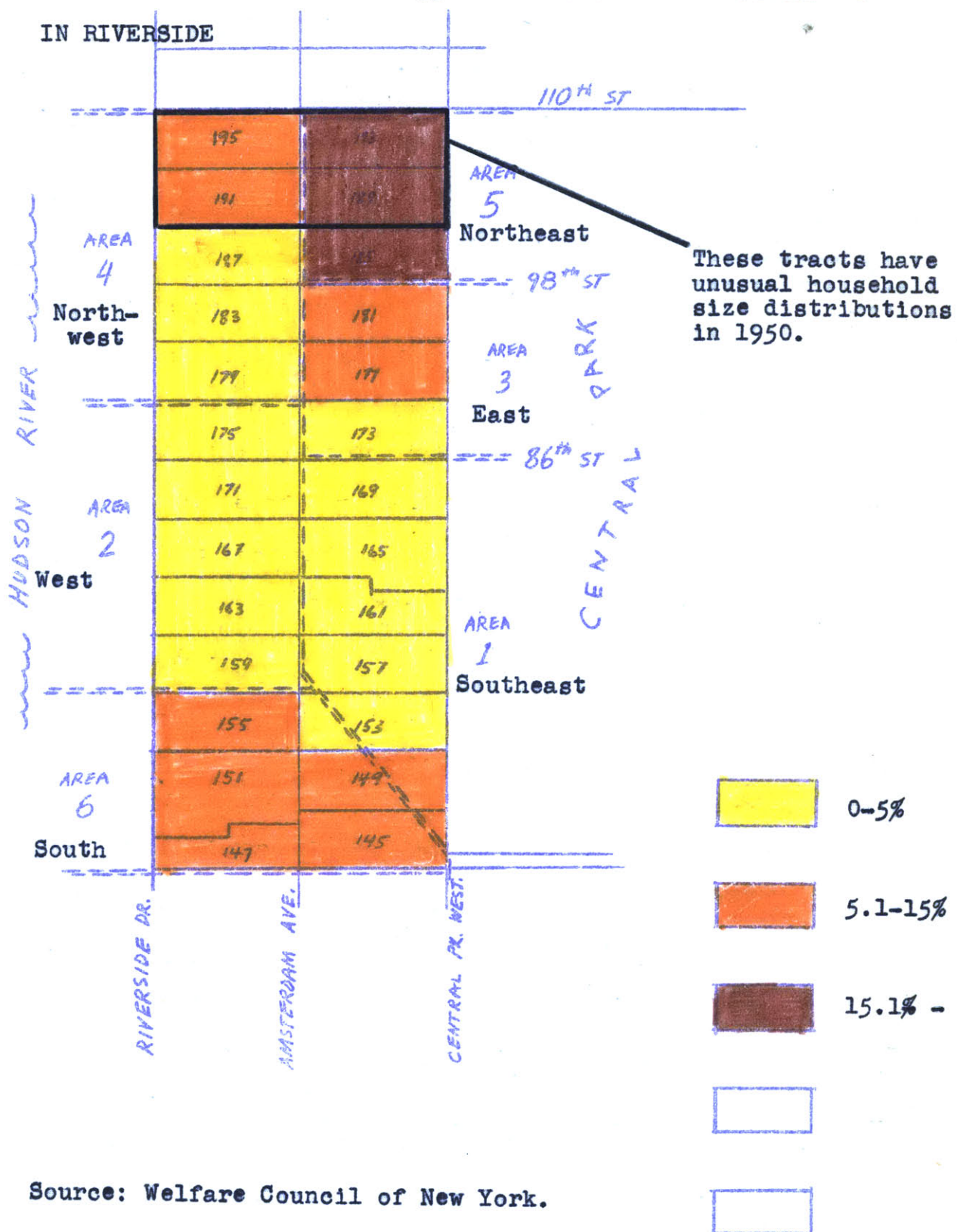
Area West, on the other hand, while not in the same condition as Northeast and South, is not in the same category, nor does it exhibit the same marked increases as the better areas. It too, therefore, will be de-emphasized in the interests of a more clear exposition.

1. But it will not be discussed in this paper. (the ethnic use of dwellings)



PERCENT OF PUERTO RICANS 1950 BY TRACTS  
IN RIVERSIDE

FIGURE 6



Source: Welfare Council of New York.

Ricans settled in the Northeast area, but have since been able to find housing in the Northwest. As part of the change described for the Northwest sector, therefore, its possible increased use by low income groups must be considered. Low income families may be an increasing element of the Northwest population.

The incidence of Puerto Ricans in the Northwest area is cited as an indication of the possibility of the enlargement of areas available to low income groups. Income distribution over a period of decades would certainly help to establish this point, but have not been readily available. Rents, for 1950 however, show a considerable part of the Northwest area is in a low rent classification. Figure 7 on page 25 shows the extent of the low rent areas in Riverside. The probability is that low income groups are taking over more and more of the Northwest area.<sup>1</sup>

There is another indication which can be used to clarify the movement of low incomes into the Northwest area. In the three most northerly census tracts in Riverside (see Figure 6 on page 23 for location), there are no one person and no four person households reported in 1950. In an adjoining tract, there has been a big drop in the number of those household sizes. Assuming no mistake in the census reports, a radical change in the population of those

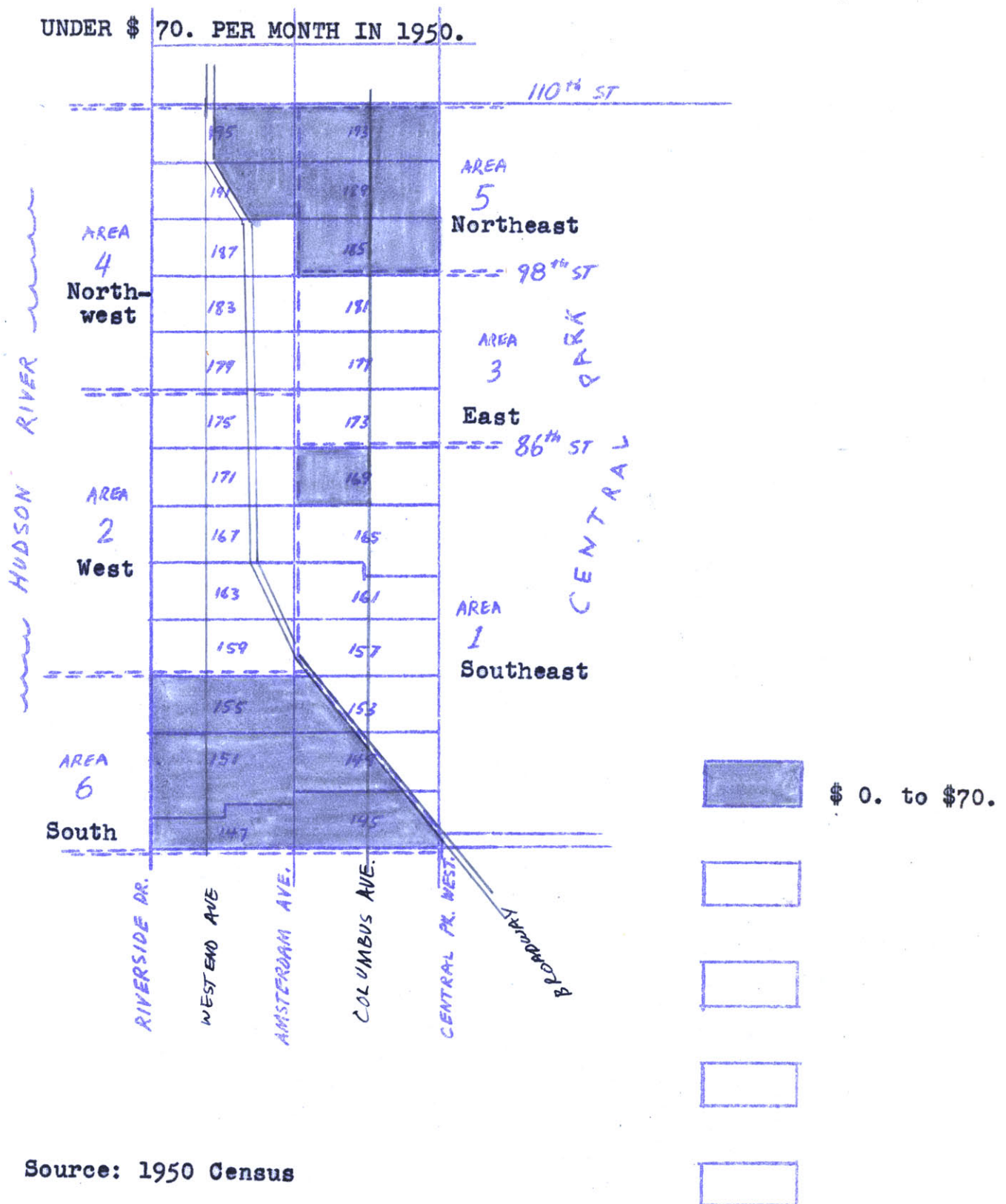
---

1. Rents for 1940 and 1950 are available on a block basis, and would be an excellent means for studying the spread of low income areas. Sorry we never thought of it.

## RIVERSIDE AREAS WITH AVERAGE RENT

FIGURE 7

UNDER \$ 70. PER MONTH IN 1950.



Source: 1950 Census

tracts was under way in 1950.<sup>1</sup>

To make up for the loss of one and four person households, there were more two and three person households, and a larger number of households above five persons. If it can be established that low income groups are moving into the Northwest area, and if the census figures turn out to be correct, then perhaps a very important link in the chain of changing characteristics will have been found.

An explanation of the process such as the following may result: Middle income tenants in those tracts do not remain in the area when their households grow to more than three persons in size. At the same time, low income groups moving into them do so with larger families or by taking in lodgers to help pay the rent. This raises the number of large families and leaves the gap in four person families. The absence of one person families might simply be related to the opening up of lodging space which was not available for rent before, the probable cheapness of this new housing, and the willingness of couples to take over apartment units

---

1. The New York regional Census office was queried about this, but referred the matter to Washington. No further action was taken.



originally used by one person households.<sup>1</sup>

While heavy overcrowding in areas such as Northeast exists, and when any mass vacancy occurs in an adjoining area, the tendency will be to enlarge the area of low/income housing in the direction of the mass vacancy. It possibly could not happen unless such a mass vacancy existed during a relatively short period. Study of these explosive shifts are likely to be extremely fruitful.

This entire discussion centers around the family with children in the middle income groups. We note their absence in the changed population characteristics on the one hand, and see the possibility of their giving up a large area of housing to low income groups on the other. We shall have to examine directly the middle income family with children. Have the population increases alone been responsible for the changes? Or has there been a change in the desirability of Riverside for such families. A study of the movement of families with children should help answer that question.

#### Movement of middle incomes from Riverside:

Generally, data on movement into and out of areas is not a-

- 
1. More attention is paid to the particular dwelling types which may be affected in the Chapter on dwelling congestion. Here, we are only interested in pointing out the possibility of a mass quick shift.

available. Whatever interpretations of age breakdowns and household sizes are made, it is not possible to tell exactly what kinds of families are moving into and out of an area. Methods for recording this movement have been developed, but they are generally burdensome, and do not give detailed information.<sup>1</sup>

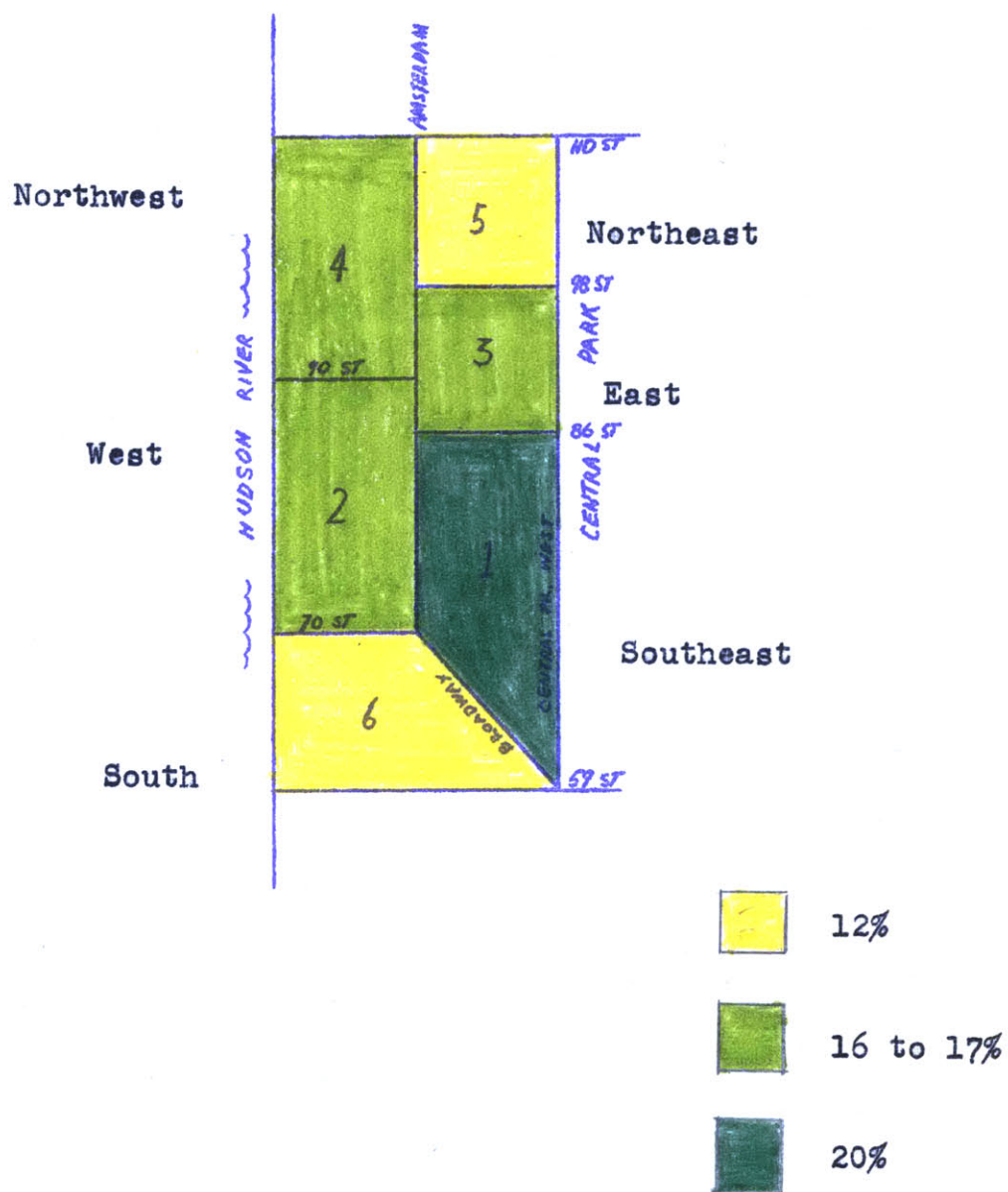
Emphasis in this study has therefore been laid on the technique of direct sampling surveys of the type of family whose movement pattern is of interest, in this case the family with growing children.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, too, the 1950 census carried a question on movement during the year 1949-1950. While it is of limited use, it may serve adequately as a frame of reference for this study. The percent moving during the year preceding the census as reported is given in Figure 8 on page 29. This movement is not of any particular type, but of all movements of households in that year.

Studies of movement conducted specifically for middle income families show differences from the general picture.

- 
1. Howard Whepple Green of Cleveland has published records of tenant movement obtained from water, gas, and electricity records. Other methods suggested include telephone and post office change of address records. All these methods, however, give only gross figures without differentiating between types of family accurately.
  2. This technique was worked out for the AIA study on the "Patterns of Urban Congestion".

PERCENT MOVING 1949 - 1950  
IN RIVERSIDE SECTIONS.

FIGURE 8



Source: 1950 Census

Families per thousand households moving to certain projects outside Riverside are given in Figure 9 on page 31.<sup>1</sup> Following is an outline of the project studied:<sup>2</sup>

1. Lexington Houses, Colonial Houses, and Dyckman Houses, all projects of the New York City Housing Authority, which rent at between \$17 and \$21 per room per month.
2. Fresh Meadows, a New York Life project in Queens which has both garden type apartments and tower apartments, a total of 3,009. Rents are about \$30 to \$35 per room.
3. Downtown project, downtown Manhattan, a very large project with rents from \$25 to \$30 per room per month.

The much greater movement from the better areas demonstrates somewhat the greater disruption of the status quo when stimulated by heavier population increases. Middle income families moved most heavily from the Northwest area, which is also the area of greatest population increase.

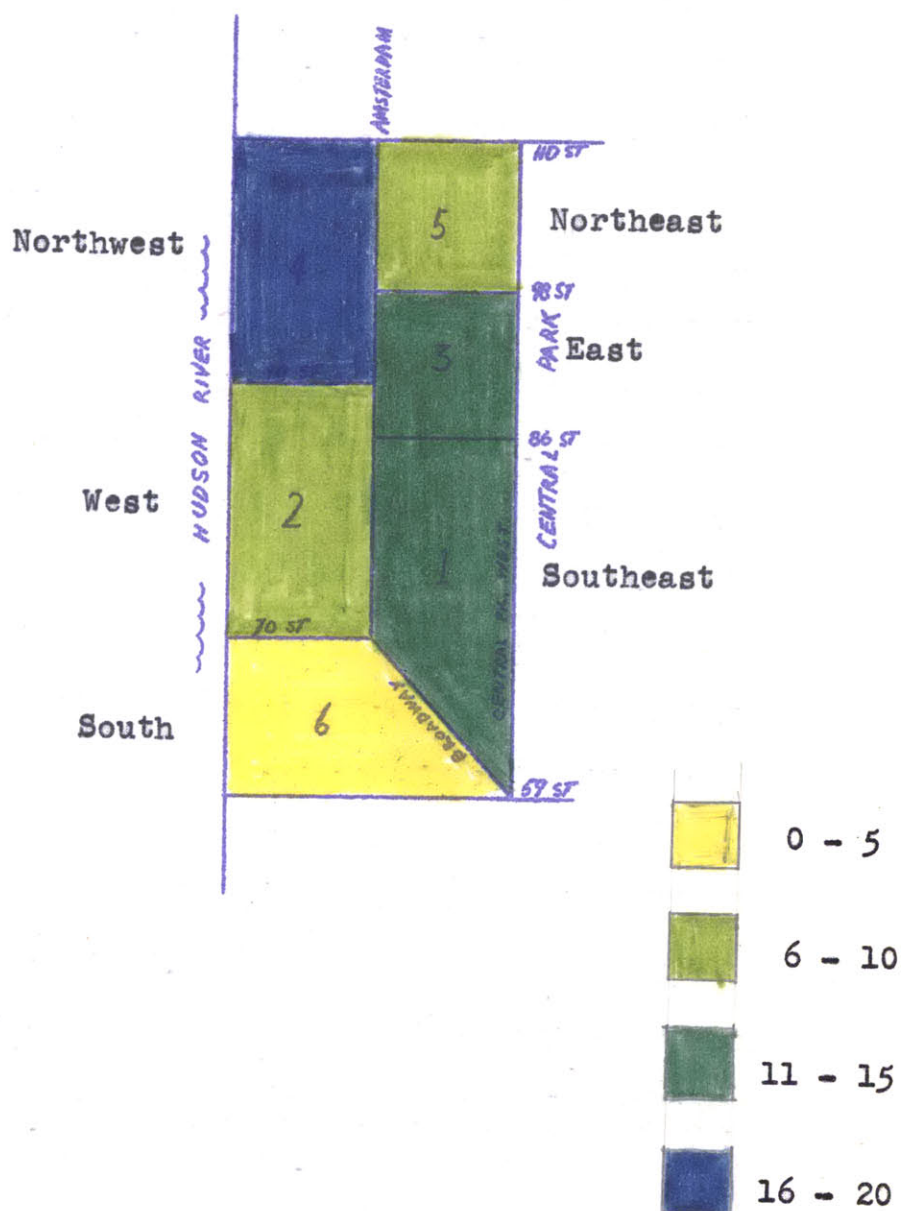
It was found that families desiring children or with one small preschool child moved from Riverside to the two higher

- 
1. Full description of movement studies in AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion".
  2. Each project was sampled 100% except for the largest where a sample of several thousand was taken. Project records of the last address of present and past tenants were taken. All projects studied were opened to occupancy since World War II.

## FAMILIES PER THOUSAND HOUSEHOLDS (1940)

FIGURE 9

MOVING TO: Fresh Meadows, New York Life project,  
NYCHA middle income projects, and  
Large downtown Manhattan development.



Source: AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion"

Note: range of  
movement indi-  
cates differences  
in tracts.

priced projects.<sup>1</sup> The percentage moving was high, almost 10% of the total tenancy coming from Riverside. In relation to other areas of the city, therefore, Riverside must be considered a deficient area in terms of the percentage of people of a certain income level desiring to leave it. Naturally, this is not a conclusion, but a hypothesis for further testing. Do families with children in Riverside of the middle income group desire to leave or not? How strong is this desire?

At the same time, the movement patterns of the lower rent projects did not parallel in all respects those in the higher rent projects. Fewer people, approximately 3%, from Riverside went to the NYCHA projects. This should not be considered conclusive evidence of anything: the projects studied have a high proportion of negro families. The breaking point, the socio-economic level at which families want or have to stay in Riverside, however, is of great importance. At what income level, \$3000, \$4000, or \$5000, do families with children find it more acceptable to stay in Riverside? If that level is so low that only those who cannot afford to move remain, Riverside is low - low as a desirable area.

- 
1. Concrete evidence is available for only two of these projects. Management in all cases confirmed this idea through their knowledge of the tenancy of their projects. In Fresh Meadows, newly-weds and couples with one pre-school child, represented 85% of the total. AIA Committee on Housing, "Patterns of Urban Congestion".

At the other extreme, how do families with children in the highest brackets fare in Riverside. Manhattan House, an upper middle income project on the East side of Central Park renting at \$65 per room per month was surveyed. Only 5% of the tenancy came from Riverside, and it is not known how many children are in the group. More studies of the upper middle income families must be made before the upper and lower limits are established. Studies in large single family developments of many types would be especially helpful in determining the relative desirability of Riverside for the type of families who buy them.<sup>1</sup>

For what income and family types is Riverside well suited, and for what income and family types is Riverside not suited? This question is of crucial importance. The average income of Riversiders moving to Fresh Meadows (the Queens project) in 1947 (the time of moving) was \$6900. A management survey taken in 1952 showed the average income had risen from \$6300 in 1947 to \$9000 in 1952.<sup>2</sup> This is a potential which Riverside lost. If these young potentially high income families are lost to Riverside, then perhaps nothing will keep the area from lower rents, lower standards, and general decline. More as an assumption than anything else, its

- 
1. Percentages moving to those projects from Riverside could be checked with those of other areas to establish the relative desirability of each. Desirability ratings for the whole of Manhattan could be found in this way.
  2. From a pamphlet issued by Fresh Meadows management in August, 1952. AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion".

a good idea to keep those families.

The final study of movement concerns those who find Riverside a desirable area. A study of Movement from the YMCA on W. 63rd Street (Southeast area) showed that of those moving from the "Y" to other areas in New York City, 60% remained in Manhattan. Of these, 50% found rooms in Riverside. Of the total moving to Riverside, 50% moved into the South east area, and 20% to the West area, showing how well-founded their reputation for transiency is. This helps to explain the high movement from these areas reported in Figure 8 on page 29.

Another project, more important in the study of middle income movement, is an apartment development in the West area. Schwab House, at 73rd Street and Riverside Drive, which rents at \$55 per room per month, was studied to determine where its tenancy originated. Of the 671 cases, 60% came from Manhattan. Of these 60%, an extraordinary percentage, 76%, came from Riverside.<sup>1</sup> Tenants came almost exclusively from the better areas.

---

1. This is an extremely high percentage. Other middle income projects studies (including upper middle projects) ranged between 20% and 50% from their immediate locale, an approximately equal population total with that of Riverside.



Especially in this case, the loss of desirability of the Northwest area is marked. Twice as many of those with incomes of more than \$7500 moved to Schwab House from Northwest than from area East, and one and one-half times as many as from the West area where Schwab is located. But perhaps even more important is the desire of so many Riverside families to be resident of Schwab House. There are few if any children in Schwab House; the majority of tenants are upper middle income adult families.

Riverside is desirable for couples not expecting to raise families, and for couples in low middle income brackets who have started families after reaching Riverside from other parts of the city. In the interviewing of tenants in Riverside, it was found that this type of family were common among those who had moved in from the outside.<sup>1</sup> During this interviewing, many families were also found in the Northwest area who had moved there from the Northeast section.

Examination of movement into and within Riverside helps us to see more clearly the types of family who find it acceptable. Small adult families in low and upper middle income brackets

---

1. About 60 families were interviewed in walk-up dwellings for the AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion". Their last address was noted.

are high up on the list. Low middle income families will probably also be well represented.

Summary:

Riverside has been under strong pressure for housing at least since 1920. Unlike Central Park East, Riverside has been unable to resist these pressures. Population has more than doubled in its best areas; the composition of its population has changed radically at the same time.

An increase of one and two person households of 12% has resulted in a drop of at least 25% in the number of dwelling units available for larger families, especially those with children.<sup>1</sup> The 18% increase of those persons over 45 years of age without a doubt means fewer families with children.

Studies of movement demonstrate the loss of middle income families intending to raise children to other areas. While there is little evidence to support the idea, possibly low middle income groups are not moving out as quickly. In fact, studies of movement into Riverside show them moving into the area. The Schwab House study demonstrates Riverside's desirability to adult families of upper middle income levels.

Further study should attempt to fill out this picture, and to show what the trends for the future can lead us to expect.

---

1. When the percentage rises from 53 to 65, only 35% of the dwelling units instead of the previous 47% are left. This remainder is 25% less. More are lost because of large adult families.

## CHAPTER II

## DWELLING CONGESTION IN RIVERSIDE

The changing population has had an effect on the use of dwellings in Riverside. One and two person households have taken over dwellings once used by larger ones. The drop of 25% in the number of dwellings available to families with children is a very considerable amount. The increased area being used by low income families probably cuts out even more of this limited supply for middle income families.

The increase in the number of dwelling units has kept pace with the increased population. In 1920, there were 3.6 persons per dwelling unit, and in 1950 only 3.2 persons per dwelling unit.<sup>1</sup> Part of the increase has been addition of new dwellings, and the rest must be attributed to conversions. Between 1940 and 1950, an increase of 9000 dwelling units were added to the supply through conversion alone. Since the total increase in dwelling units since 1920 has been some 40,000 units, we can assume the majority of the increase in dwelling units were due to conversion.

Though the number of dwelling units has increased, and the actual number of persons per dwelling unit has decreased, there is no reason to believe that the number of rooms per person have become more plentiful. The reverse is equally

---

1. Data on dwelling units compiled from 1950 U.S. Census of Population.

possible. The conversion of brownstones, and more recently of apartments, has provided an increased number of units to accommodate the new small families in Riverside. But what of the family with children? And how effective for dwelling have these conversions been?

On the basis of this limited study of the process of adjusting existing structures to changing needs, no conclusions can be set forth. What has been done, however, is to point up the need for a full and comprehensive study of use of dwellings in Riverside. Such a study would demonstrate the actual use of brownstones, apartment houses, and other types of dwelling in Riverside. It will also take cognizance of trends of movement from one type to another.

The importance of the use of dwellings lies in the relation between the present use and the most effective use. It is possible that they are not being put to their best use, that the tenants in the buildings are not satisfied with them. It is also possible that there are just too many people per dwelling for healthful living.

But not only the increased population may be responsible for the ineffectiveness of some dwelling types. The very nature of brownstones must be seriously questioned as an adequate way of life for anyone. Elevator apartments, too, may, at

least as presently constructed, be the subject of soul searching on the part of architects and builders. Perhaps as fully responsible as anything else for the dissatisfaction of families with children with all parts of Riverside is the design of buildings and the lack of built in amenities for children. No one yet has built a children's apartment house.

In this paper, however, we are not stressing what might have been, but concentrating on what is. The major emphasis is on the use to which dwellings have been and are being put, and how effective this use is. Trends in the use of certain dwelling types are also explored to advantage. They show the desires of tenants, and make predictions of the changing use of dwellings possible.

The hypotheses which are possible are many and varied. We have tried in this paper to limit the discussions to the most basic consideration: how effectively have the dwellings of Riverside adjusted to meet the need of a changed and increased population.

Brownstones and certain types of elevator apartments have been studied separately. Predominant building types common to most of the area have been chosen to give both a comprehensive and comparable view of the situation in various parts of the area.

Changed use of walk-up dwellings:

There are many types of walkups in Riverside. They vary from single family houses to dumbbell tenements. From this variety, it seemed best to stick to a type which was available to a considerable extent throughout the whole area. There are few single family residences in the Northwest section, one of the critical sections of the area. They were therefore eliminated from consideration. Dumbbells were also eliminated since there are few of them outside of the Northeast and East areas. The final choice was the old-law, converted multiple dwelling on a 20 foot lot which has in its converted form about half the density of dumbbell tenements.<sup>1</sup>

When single family brownstones first came on the Riverside scene, nobody wanted them.<sup>2</sup> They were too big, too expensive, and too difficult to run properly without many servants. A maid had to run upstairs and downstairs, be everywhere at once. Families put in telephone systems, and hired two maids, but it was no use. Three and four flights of stairs was just too much to handle. Lodgers were invited

- 
1. For full description of samples drawn and sources of data, see files on "Patterns of Urban Congestion".
  2. Much of the material given here is drawn from Alan Burnham's report to the AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion".

through an ad in the paper to take a room or even a whole floor. An apartment on the top floor could be made very attractive, and soon it became common to rent out a floor. But alas and alack, nothing was sufficiently helpful to take away the frightful disadvantages of stair climbing and expensiveness. As a final solution to the difficulty, brownstones with one apartment on a floor were built; all single family residences were quickly converted to multiple dwelling use.

Conversion of brownstones may be a primitive or a very substantial affair. In single family houses, a simple and profitable method of conversion was to put locks on all the doors except the bathroom door, rent out all the rooms with locks on the doors, and collect rent every week. This practice was continued with the newer multiple dwellings which were often converted to rooming houses in exactly the same way. In short order, along with the rise of the apartment house for family living, large quarters in brownstones were converted into the smallest possible units.

While this system still flourishes, the steadily improved standards in rooming house operation, and the increased desire of tenants for complete apartments for which they were willing to pay, has led to a substantial form of conversion. Since the depression, more and more rooming houses have been reconverted. Plumbing and heating systems have

been completely overhauled, two apartments are put on a floor each with its own kitchen and bath facilities, some closet space is added, bells for each tenant are installed, and in general within the limitations of the building, it is made as close to true apartment life as possible.

Yet despite these extensive changes, the brownstone remains inferior to the apartment. Interviews with tenants show a much larger proportion dissatisfied with their accommodations than in apartment houses.<sup>1</sup> Their main bones of contention are the lack of modernity, the lack of elevators, and the lack of space. Their desires are to get into an apartment house which has elevators, is modern, is well-furnished, and is reasonable to rent. That last item, rent, is what keeps most tenants in brownstones. They are less expensive.

Single working women, students, aged persons, and couples just starting out find living in brownstones the best compromise between what they want and what they can afford.

---

1. AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion". Two sets of interviews were made touching on various aspects of tenant life. Movement, satisfaction with housing, satisfaction with area, statistics on rent, income, desires in housing and area, size of family, are among the subjects covered. About 100 interviews were taken by Hunter College and Columbia students, the former supervised by Walter Thabit, the latter by Mrs. Arlene Kohn. Interviewing was done in randomly selected buildings of particular types, in pre-selected tracts in different sections of Riverside. Much of the data is used in the following pages and will be so noted where necessary.



It is rare to find families with children except in the larger apartments (2½ rooms). There, the children are all pre-school age, very rarely more than one to a family, and usually only a year or less old. These families find it difficult to stay long in brownstones. They soon find that children devour space like ice cream. They have to leave soon thereafter.

Density in brownstones averages out to about one room per person or a little less. The range of possibilities is very small. The number of persons in an apartment is nearly always equal to the number of rooms in it. The tendency, however, is toward a higher average number of persons per room. Couples take over one and one-and-a-half room apartments which used to be occupied by single persons. In the northern section, there is reason to believe that Puerto Rican families are being accommodated in brownstones at much higher densities.<sup>1</sup>

Dwelling in brownstones is inferior dwelling. It is considered inferior to apartment house living by all who live that way. Nevertheless, because of the pressure of population increase, and because the fundamental elements of

---

1. This conclusion is not statistically justified in this report. Various other reports concerning Puerto Rican overcrowding have been culled and this condition certainly does exist. To what extent in the types of building being discussed here, we cannot say.

complete apartments have been built into them, brownstones are being lived in by an increasing number of people. They are not yet generally overcrowded, but there is every reason to suspect such a development in the immediate future.

Why have brownstones continued to exist? Thousands had been torn down between 1900 and 1930 to make way for new apartment houses at higher densities. Suddenly, all new building came to an end. Densities in brownstones may have increased to the point where it became uneconomic to tear them down.

High-density dumbbell tenements having low rents but a very large number of tenants per house, are generally in this situation. It does not pay to repair them, invest in them, or take the risk of replacing them. Brownstones may approach this condition through constant conversion to higher densities.

This possibility only complicates an already complicated situation. Originally built for families with children, brownstones are no longer useful for them. The yard space in which they used to play is closed. The one family per floor multiple dwelling is now two small apartments. The single family brownstone is similarly converted. As these conversions are made permanent through investments in kitchens, bathrooms, plumbing, and partitioning, the chance

that they will return to family use becomes smaller and smaller.

The present tenants of brownstones, the one and two person adult families, cannot make proper use of them either. In the same ground space, at least three and possibly five times as many adult households could be better accommodated in nine story buildings.<sup>1</sup> The apartments would be much better for the tenants in terms of usable space, social needs, equipment, and having the added advantage of elevators. The present tenancy is using too much back yard space and front of the house space which could have been used by children at play.

At the use of one apartment per floor, brownstones would be infinitely better used for families with children. Mothers could watch their children at play, a situation which allows real use of the outdoors to complement internal space. This is a necessary adjunct to middle income family life for it cuts down the internal space required for bringing up a family. Brownstones, inadequate by todays standards in any event, would nevertheless be better used if families were in possession. They are not in possession. As the size of apartments is much too small at present for families with children, there is no

---

1. This is the present height limit on most of the streets with brownstones.

likelihood that middle income families will make use of them. If low income groups are crowded into these apartments, then both overcrowding and congestion will be the result. At least half the apartments will not be able to make use of supervised external play. Mothers will not be able to watch their children at play; their apartments may be in the back of the house; the backyards will probably not be made available to them either.

Brownstones were always ineffective dwellings, even those built for small families from the beginning. The single persons and couples in them desire to move into regular apartment houses when they can afford it. Apartment life is more desirable for adult families, but the apartment houses were originally built for families with children. They left the brownstones for the apartments; the brownstones were converted, and now are not acceptable except for low income families for which purpose they are no longer suited.

#### The changing apartment house:

Apartment houses in Riverside are gradually changing from family dwellings to other types. In order to get some idea of the magnitude and direction of this change, study and interviewing was undertaken in some of the more common types of apartments. Case studies of luxury types were gathered; some more intensive work was done on six

and nine story elevator apartment buildings. Altogether some twenty buildings were studied in detail.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with luxury types, it was found that apartments were in general quite large, that a three bedroom unit could have as much space as an entire brownstone. There were many more rooms devoted to things such as libraries, maid's rooms, and the like, which accounts somewhat for the higher space standards in these apartments. It was from these buildings, that all elevator structures took their cue. Apartment houses built after the first luxury types, were built with many rooms per apartment, with a declining amount of space and privacy. Since apartments in elevator structures were built to obviate the difficulties of brownstone single family life, the original space standards were high.<sup>2</sup>

Apartments for middle income groups were all built with an average of 6 rooms per apartment.<sup>3</sup> Before the 1920's, at any rate, besides whatever apartment hotels were built, most apartments in Riverside were probably built for

- 
1. For full details of the elevated apartment studies, see AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion".
  2. For fuller and more detailed exposition, see Alan Burnham's report to AIA Committee on Housing, "The Early Apartment House".
  3. No apartment houses studied of earlier types (pre 1920) had less than six rooms in each apartment originally.

family living. After that time, those new apartments which were built may have had smaller units, but the emphasis remained on the larger apartment unit throughout the major building periods of Riverside.

But this situation did not last long. As early as 1924, one of the six story elevator apartments studied was converted into rooms.<sup>1</sup> Many gentlemen's residence clubs were formed, the large apartment units broken into sleeping rooms, and families with children were shunted out of them. This practise continued, until in Southwest today, none of the six or nine story buildings studied remain unconverted.

In both the Southeast and West areas, of 9 six and nine story buildings studied, 8 of them had been converted into between three and five times as many units as previously. From a total of 272 apartments, conversions made a total of 903 dwelling units or sleeping rooms. Three of the eight conversions were made since 1945. The sample of buildings was drawn at random from selected tracts; they were chosen because they were two of the most commonly found building types in the area. They were not luxury apartments, nor were they apartment hotels.

This tendency to convert dwelling units from large family

---

1. New York City Building Department files.

to adult small family use is accompanied by decreased demands for large apartments by families. The larger apartments in even the best types of houses have been converted to smaller apartments.<sup>1</sup> Conversion is widespread in all types of apartment houses.

In addition to conversion in legally acceptable ways, there is a considerable amount of illegal conversion, and the taking in of lodgers. This is especially the case in sections where deterioration is most advanced. In the Northwest area, for example, conversions are quite low, population is continuously increasing, and reports of illegal conversion and lodging is widespread.<sup>2</sup>

It has become common practise for a family to rent out a room of their apartment to a student or some other single person to help pay the rent for an oversized apartment. As brownstones become increasingly used as complete apartments, an unsatisfied need for small sleeping rooms such as those used by students and elderly people of moderate means is being increasingly met in elevator apartment

- 
1. Since 1935, gradual and steady conversion of the largest apartments to smaller ones have been taking place in the Apthorpe Apartments (in the Southeast area) an Astor Estate Luxury development.
  2. This is not proven. Eye-witness accounts are numerous. Population increases and conversion rates are available for study.

houses.

A direct takeoff on early brownstone conversion is visible in elevator apartment houses. A new landlady type, the "tenantlady", has been helping meet the needs of single persons in apartment houses. A tenant "converts" her apartment through the time tested method of putting locks on all doors except the bathroom and kitchen.<sup>1</sup> These rooms are rapidly rented to single persons. In some cases, regular homes for the aged are run in apartments complete with meals and maid service. A sort of rooming house business in elevated apartments is growing by leaps and bounds.

These various conversion and lodging practises are cutting deeply into the space available for families with children. Originally built entirely for families with children, the changing tenancy of apartment houses makes them less and less desirable. Families like to be close to other families. Since apartment houses can no longer be geared to family life exclusively, the unique advantages they once possessed are lost. Extensive research on this one aspect is called for. A principle point of congestion is the degree of homogeneity required among families with children

---

1. Cases are mentioned where even this is not done: indeed a most primitive approach unused except by amateurs in the rooming house business.



for effective apartment life. What is the "breaking point", the point at which mixed types of tenancy works to the distinct disadvantage of families with children?

As yet today, many families with children still live in Riverside. Elevator apartments are still the main source of dwelling open to them (except for some types of better grade walk-ups which have a large number of rooms at reasonable rents. There are not too many of these). But as apartments are converted to use by other family types, fewer and fewer apartments are left for families with children.

Naturally, there is no general condition whereby all apartment houses are undergoing changes at the same time. It hits one apartment house after another. One apartment house will have been converted completely to single person occupancy during the depression. Another will have become so full of transients that families with children will not stay there after a time. Still another may at the moment only have a few families letting a room to lodgers. In others, management keeps tenancy well-controlled, converts as is necessary to accommodate smaller families, and tries to maintain its property as "family" residence. But despite the best intentions, building after building is going over to other types of family, to the adult family in all its various compositions.

Perhaps the best illustration of the present tendency, the type of family now looking for apartments of a better type in Riverside today, is had from a report by a member of the staff of the AIA Committee on Housing. This report was made on the subject of the type of tenancy moving into a recently completed large development in the West area in Riverside. The report is given in full:<sup>1</sup>

"The people who live there are atypical in several respects. Most of them are at least 40 years old. There are an unusually large number of unattached people, both male and female. These females consist largely of widows and career women with a smattering of divorcees, separated women and kept women. The men include widowers, bachelors and apparently a good number of homosexuals. The couples living there are mostly middle-aged with married children or daughters of marriageable age. The childless couples seem to be younger.

The occupations of the tenants are somewhat varied. A large number of them are retired. Many own medium size factories. Others own restaurants, hotels and real estate. Some are high level executives or well paid specialists in moderately large organizations. A few are connected with the entertainment business in either an artistic or technical capacity. The incomes of these people is steady and most of the time is at least of the magnitude of \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year."

How careful an analysis was made by the builders of this

---

1. Report by Mr. Morris Weitman who made the movement survey of this development for the AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion".

project is not known, but without a doubt they carefully took into consideration what the real desire in Riverside was. An extremely large percentage of the tenants came from Riverside itself. The builders aimed at Riverside dwellers. Of course, the noteworthy aspect of this report aside from its interesting contents, is a negative one. There is no mention of families with small children at all. This report was checked with the management who confirms the paucity of small children in the development. No management policy of keeping out small children was adopted.

This very important development in the use of apartment houses cannot be overlooked. Families with children are being slowly replaced with other types of families. Is there going to be anywhere for families with children to go?

#### Decline of building services:

Management concerns attest to the decline of building services in Riverside.<sup>1</sup> This view is borne out through interviews with tenants, and through building case studies. Why this is so is not made very clear. Rent control is blamed by management to a considerable extent as

---

1. All of the six management concerns interviewed about conditions agree on this point in general. Rent control and rising cost of labor is blamed for the situation. AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion"

are the changing type of tenant. Though there is little explicit data on which to make an analysis of the situation, some attempt to make a more logical explanation seems justified.

First, the decline in services is more advanced in the Northwest area than in the East area. Services, as stated by tenants in that section, had deteriorated, was spotty, and complete aspects of maintenance were neglected altogether. Tenants were asked to fix up their own apartments, painting of halls was neglected, elevator operation was being cut down or converted to self-service, seasonal maintenance of outsides of buildings had been put off for many years. There is no doubt that rent control had some effect on this work. Yet, where differences in quality of maintenance from one area to another exist, other factors are likely to play a more important role.

One such factor may have to do with the ownership of the building. Where banks or other long range investors were owners, maintenance was infinitely better and more responsible. In the Northwest section, there seems to have been a higher turnover of buildings from the hands of responsible long range investors to landlords whose first actions were cutting services.<sup>1</sup> A point which goes along with the

---

1. This is a guess based on a few isolated cases and newspaper accounts of sales.

above is the probability that such responsible investors as banks and other institutions only keep buildings which are considered as desirable investments over the long term. Obviously, they do not consider Northwest buildings too desirable.

On the other hand, deterioration of services seems to be restricted more to areas in which conversions are not the rule. Legally converted apartment houses are more in evidence in the Southeast. In this area, maintenance is more adequate, less spotty than in areas such as Northwest. No causal relation is implied; it is simply pointed out that more conversion and better maintenance seem to go together.

Finally, if the Northwest area is less desirable, and if conversions in that section are relatively few in number, then we may conclude that lack of conversion to suit the needs of tenants goes along with a declining area. In other words, since legal conversion requires a capital investment, and in the case of better apartments it may be considerable, then there is little of this type of investment in a deteriorating area. Nothing will be done to prevent an area from further decline if its facilities are overtaxed, and if its chances for increased value are low.

The general dwelling picture:

As mentioned in the chapter on population, a strange situation was reported in the 1950 census. In several tracts,

there were no one person and no four person households listed.<sup>1</sup> This meant there were no single persons living in their own apartments. It doesn't mean there were no single persons living in those tracts, but only that they were either living with roommates or as lodgers of other tenants. It might also be interpreted that most families with one child were not staying in the area long enough to have two children. Another distinct possibility was that all such families felt obliged to be part of larger households either through taking in lodgers themselves or being someone else's sub-tenants.

Hypothetically, some situation like the following existed in those tracts: In brownstones with their two and three room apartments, no single persons could be found. But as they are generally substandard in terms of light and air, as only one room is generally of any adequate size, they would not be host to families with two children either. The pressure for housing was severe enough to restrict the holding of brownstone apartments to small adult families of more than one person, but the standard of the dwelling was low enough to exclude middle income families with two children or four adults.

---

1. This was a distinct departure from other years for which data was available as well as from other tracts in the area. It is such an overwhelming switch that differences in definitions could not possibly have any meaning nor help to explain away the phenomenon. Unless it is a mistake, it's real.

In apartment houses, though a great number of apartments exist which were adequate for a family of four, most were not used by families with many children. Some were undoubtedly converted for use by lodgers. Others are in the hands of old people, childless couples, and the like. Evidently the breaking point in these tracts was reached, and apartment houses were no longer considered by the growing family.

There was a steady exodus from the area of families before they reached the four person size. If no one else raised their families in that area, they could not be expected to do so either. At the same time, the number of two and three person families increased tremendously over the 1940 figure, as did the number of families over four persons. These figures may reflect two things: that density was growing higher and apartments getting tighter, and that either low income large families were in those areas or that the number of rooming-house-apartments had grown.

As this area (part of Northwest and the better part of East) is in the most rapidly declining section of Riverside, it is very possible that the state of household sizes in 1950 reflected the final stages of a turning over of tenancy in that area. If no or very few young couples are interested in raising their families there, then the pressure for housing for low incomes is sure to be satisfied as

other family groups in the area die off. That seems to be the state of things. It should be studied closely to determine exactly what is going on.

If our analysis of the situation in brownstones and elevator apartments should turn out to be essentially sound as a result of further study, then such a situation as existed in these Northern tracts can be expected elsewhere. The end result will be a Riverside in which there are few middle income families, a predominantly low income area.

It is interesting to note that Alan Burnham's report to the AIA on the early apartment house from 1870 to 1900 has very few references to children.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard adage reflected itself in the literature as well, but this can hardly be assumed. Rather, it would seem that children and their needs were never really taken into consideration in the development of the apartment house. The original brownstone was a house with a yard, a place for children to play. Originally too, brownstones were large enough to absorb children in them without disturbing their elders all day long. Though many advantages were built into early apartment houses. play space disappeared, and it is doubtful that any conveniences for children were considered.

---

1. Very few notes on children are found. Most of these give the impression that children are a necessary evil.



The lack of built-in features for children are most evident today. Streets are now too crowded to use; the buildings themselves have no facilities for meeting the needs of children.

If, on the one hand, families with children were expected to live happily and gracefully in Riverside, we can only ask, on the other, what happened to the planning for smaller families and single persons. Apparently, there was no planning at all. When brownstones were fashionable, builders built brownstones. As apartment houses became fashionable, builders built apartment houses. The effect this would have on the community was not even considered. With the abandon usually reserved for financing wars, a billion dollars went into Riverside without the slightest safeguard for its future. As a result of the complete lack of any policy of development, it is no wonder that the changed use of dwellings was made so ineffectively that physical and social deterioration was the result.

An objective look at the nature of buildings and their present tenancy brings the following facts to light:

1. Brownstones, originally built to serve family needs, and still the most effective building types to serve those needs in terms of indoor-outdoor space combinations, is being used by adults only, and will probably not be made acceptable to families with children.

2. Apartment houses, where most families with children live today, being best suited to the needs of adults, and now being increasingly converted to meet those needs, are becoming less available to and acceptable for families with children.
3. While the loss of adequate dwelling accommodations in Riverside may not be pleasing to families with children, they accept the fact that Riverside is no place for them to bring up their families. They do not even think of remaining in Riverside to do it.
4. The replacement of families with children in apartment houses with small adult families from brownstones is the signal for low income families to get into the brownstones at much higher densities which results in both overcrowding as well as congestion.

This is in essence the fate of the dwelling structure in Riverside. It is our essential hypothesis for dwelling congestion. Tenants are in the wrong kinds of buildings. Buildings are being converted to suit the needs of new types of tenants. Families with growing children are being completely lost in the shuffle.

This state of affairs may have bothered many people. But the situation shows that no one ever did anything about it.

The real estate interests either did not know or did not care about communities. It is most likely they thought only about houses. This is a critical mistake, an error which is proving to be most costly in Riverside. Not only your building, Mr. Real Estate Man, but every building is part of the dwelling structure in Riverside. You should have thought about the effects of constructing hundreds of apartment buildings with the same number of rooms for the same number of people. You should have remembered that there are big families and small ones, that children need space. You should have done something to keep the brownstones open to family living, or provided something else that would.

## CHAPTER III

## CONGESTION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Accompanying the changes in the use of dwellings described in the last chapter, entire sections of Riverside have become different in character. Neighborhoods which used to be the family-with-children type, are now tenanted with transient adults. Respectable middle income areas are now host to low income groups. The social structure presents a completely changed picture from the one which existed twenty or thirty years ago.

The needs for community facilities also grew and changed.<sup>1</sup> New groups needed different facilities than the old. Low income groups required services which were different from those in other areas. Transients needed more cafeterias. Changing ethnic groups required churches and synagogues. And they needed them in the areas to which they moved.

But community facilities labored under a handicap in trying to adjust to these needs. Churches, once built, last

---

1. Community facilities as used here means the normally used services available for dwellers in an area which are outside the dwelling. Hidden services such as water, electricity, etc., are not included. Post offices, shops, churches, movie theaters, parks, playgrounds, schools, etc., are the type referred to here.

for long periods of time. The same can be said of schools, shopping areas, and parks. It is not easy to replace them, change their location, or their sponsorship. There is no area which can be appropriated for new uses. Adjustments have to be made slowly, yielding to outside pressures with seeming reluctance.

The effectiveness with which adjustments were made must be ascertained. It has not been possible to do so in this paper, but this aspect of housing is so important that it cannot be ignored. Therefore, on the basis of the little data available, and drawing heavily on observation and report, a tentative hypothesis has been drawn as a basis for further research. While the few case studies and observations are admittedly inadequate for the formation of a reasonable hypothesis, it is hoped to demonstrate the basic direction in which research should be made.

#### Churches and Schools:

The West End Presbyterian Church is located at Amsterdam Avenue and 105th Street.<sup>1</sup> At one time it was in an area of middle income groups. Its members came from all around, numbered 3000 about 40 years ago. Since then, the

---

1. Information on West End Presbyterian Church is taken from an unpublished paper by Miss Janet Scheff.

area has become low income, the borderline between the "good" section and the "bad" section having moved both North and West to 110th Street and Broadway (see Figure 10 on page 65). It eclipsed the church. Today, its membership is around 600.

It has always been a church which served the middle income groups. Lately, recognizing the changing nature of the area, they have tried to meet this changing need. For eighteen months, the Youth Board used their facilities to carry on a program. But when the YMCA asked for similar privileges, it was claimed that the Youth Board had, "...abused the privileges and brought in a bad element".<sup>1</sup>

Naturally there is difficulty in a church with a tradition of handling the problems and needs of middle income groups to adjust to the needs of low income groups. Apparently, the changes are taking place, slowly and with caution; with mistakes and with successes.

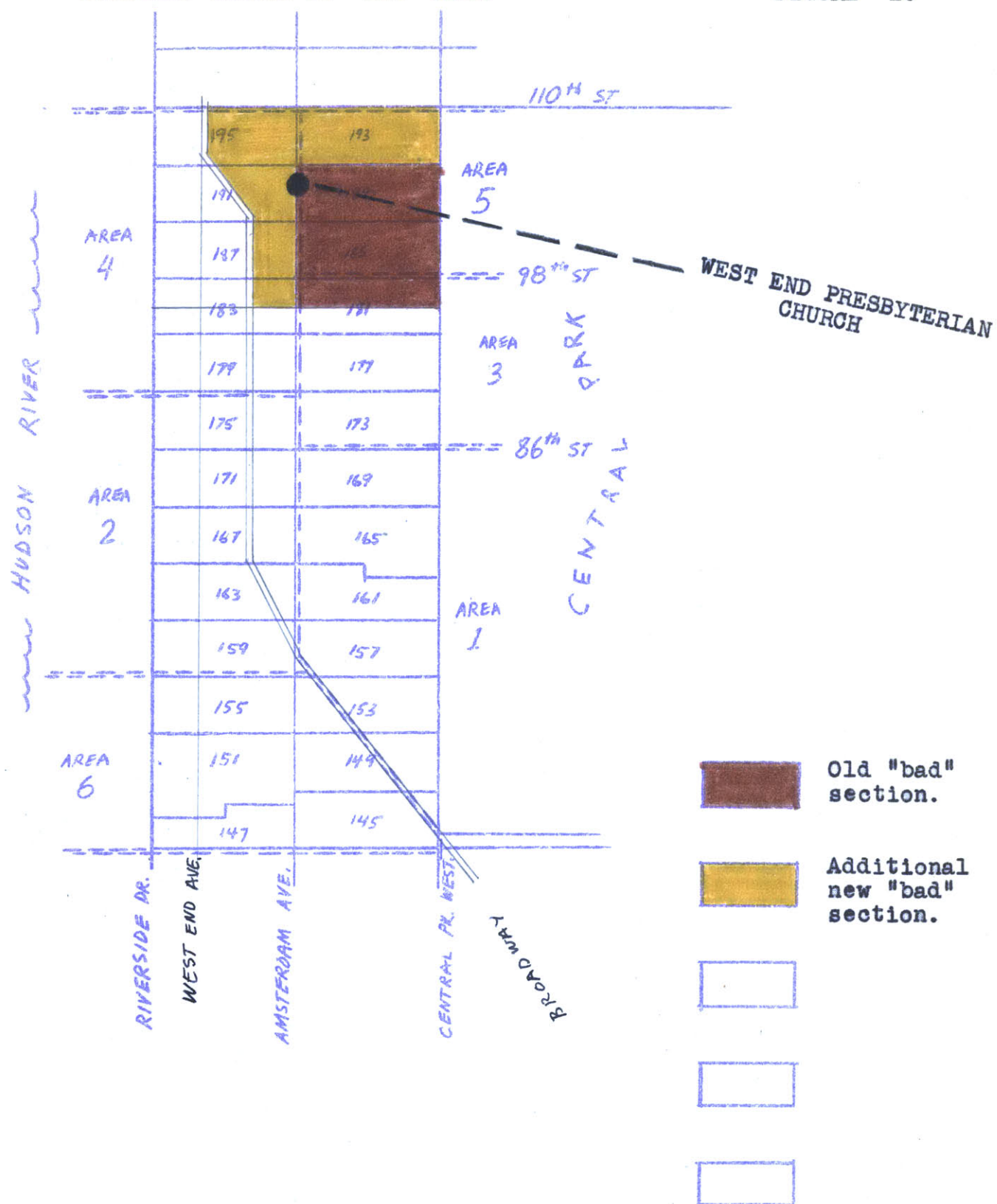
But what of the middle income groups. Where do they go to church now? What of the Presbyterians who still live West of Broadway. Are they going to church in the proportions which they might if the church still were located in a "middle class" area? Probably not, would be a

---

1. From a YMCA report concerning possibilities for recreation in Riverside.

POSSIBLE GROWTH OF "BAD" AREA

FIGURE 10



reasonable answer. It is very likely that people will refuse to cross the border between "good" and "bad" for many things.

Practically all interviews with tenants in the Northwest section reflect fear of "bad" people, of Puerto Ricans, of low income groups, of gangs, of rapes. A sampling of their comments in this regard shows emotionalism and irrationality, but real fear, nevertheless:<sup>1</sup>

"....people in the house are all right, but in the section they're terrible - foreign people, ordinary people - mostly Puerto Ricans and Spanish....I think the Puerto Ricans are directly to blame....dangerous to walk alone at night....there are so many Puerto Ricans....new kinds of people, they break everything up....anywhere they go they run people out with their filth and dirt and crime....slums compared with what it used to be....robberies in every apartment in building and also in neighboring buildings....fights in the street in the middle of the night....brawls....prostitutes and trash...."

This is the sort of fear one can get easily. It comes naturally. It is the kind of fear that will keep you from going to church. Especially to evening meetings. It can keep you from a lot of things.

Families of middle income living in the Northwest, who feel so restricted that they cannot make full use of a facility, do not really have use of the facility in

---

1. From files of AIA Housing Research



question. Possibly then, the loss of membership is not fully the result of lost Presbyterian population. Equally possible is the idea that Presbyterians West of Broadway haven't got the use of a church. The church cannot reach them; they don't dare to try and reach the church.

School districts are drawn from Central Park to Riverside Drive. Children of low and middle income groups go to the same schools. But the schools are also located on Amsterdam Avenue in the "bad" section. Middle income parents fear the contaminating effect of "foreigners" and "low" types. They view fights, torn clothes, filthy words, and dirty children with particular horror. For them the schools are in the wrong place; if they can afford it, they send their children to private schools; then again, it might be less expensive to move.

Puerto Ricans make up half the enrollment in some schools. The parents fear Puerto Ricans, and thus fear for their children coming into contact with them. The tension between the groups is continuously rising. Nor is there any chance for much reduction of this tension unless the groups can get together. Parents associations and other civic groups have little likelihood of being strongly formed in such a situation. Middle income parents are not likely to walk into an area for a meeting if they worry about getting robbed or beaten on the way. Here again

is a facility which does not meet middle income requirements. Population shifts were distributed in such a way that middle income groups were isolated from the schools their children attended (see Figure 11 on page 69).

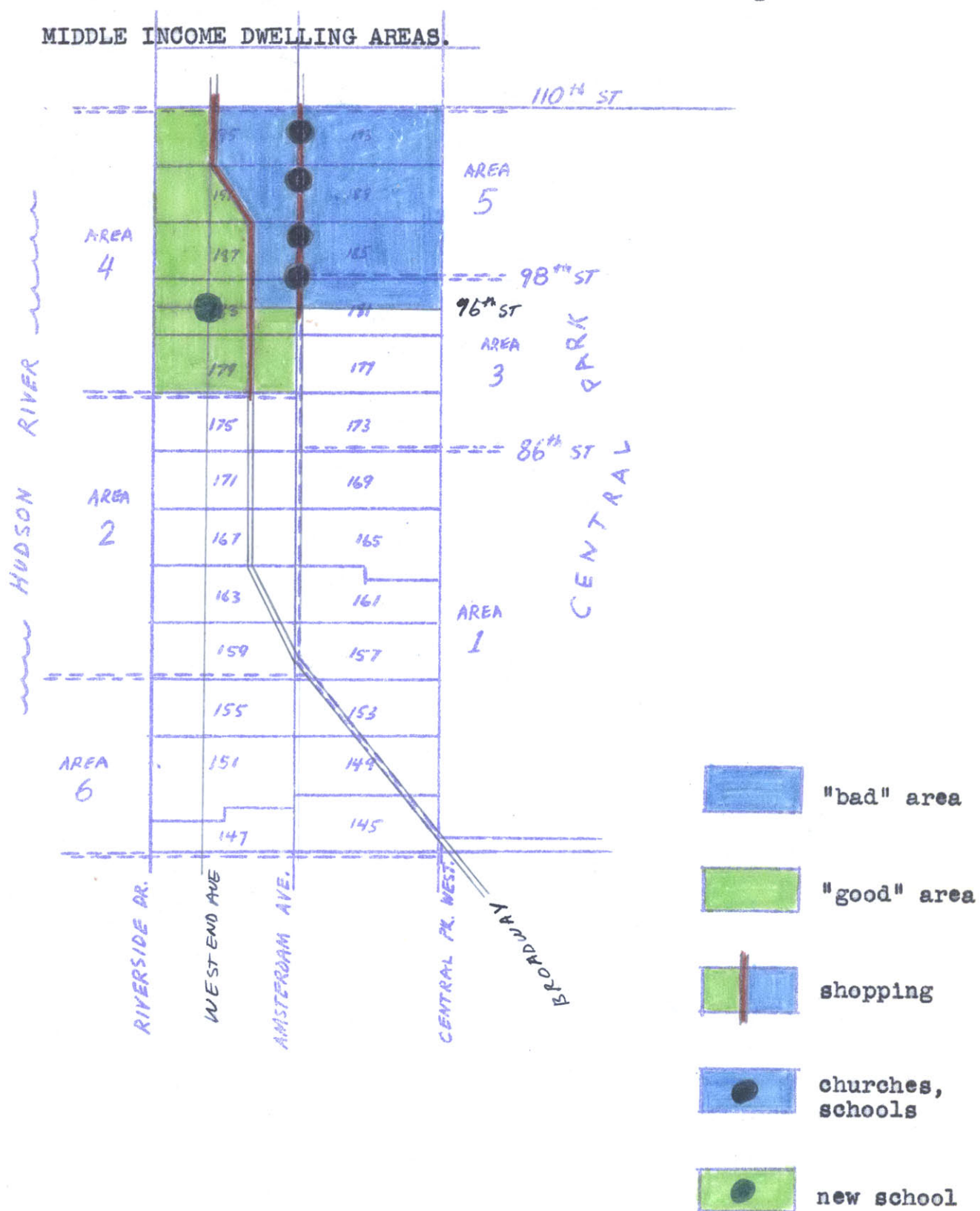
A new school, however, has been opened on West End Avenue since 1951. Middle income groups are very happy with it. It is in the heart of the middle income district, is available for meetings of parents and civic groups. From this building, over the past two years, a rash of organizations have had their beginning. A few weeks ago, a large well-attended conference on Puerto Rican integration was held there. Points of view were exchanged, Puerto Ricans met with the middle income group, and real attempts were made to better understanding.

These newly formed groups led by inspired community leaders would have been impossible to organize if meetings were to be held on Amsterdam Avenue. These activities, in which middle income groups are expected to participate, must be held on middle income ground. People must feel safe enough to air their prejudices and hostilities without feeling afraid. They need space in which to express their opinions, worship God, sing and dance, or do whatever pleases them in the way they like.

Social leveling is all very well, but middle income groups will not stand for subordination to the standards of low

ISOLATION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES FROM  
MIDDLE INCOME DWELLING AREAS.

Figure 11



income groups. Certain types of facilities have to be in their own areas before they can feel free to join actively in the participation of community life. When community facilities such as churches and schools are lost, most of the feeling for the community goes with it. Since they are an essential part of housing, and if they are not replaced, the only alternative is to move somewhere else where they can be obtained.

#### Shopping facilities:

Almost without exception, those people interviewed expressed satisfaction with shopping facilities. The saving graces of Riverside seemed to be transportation, shopping, parks, and convenience, in that order. And yet, despite this universal approval, some aspects of the shopping situation seem tied up with the dissatisfaction of people with the places in which they live. Neighborhood shopping (if it ever existed) has disappeared.

When population was half what it is today, shops which served relatively small numbers of people were numerous. The various types of shops were distributed over the entire area. Although there was string development, shopping was distributed in little clusters all along Broadway.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. This is conjecture. The growth of shopping, and its changes, its type, and distribution must be studied.

Population growth had two results: it forced a more intensive use of the fixed amount of shopping area, and spurred the growth of regionalism in the distribution of shops. Stores are generally more crowded than previously. This crowding is accompanied by the tendency of certain types of shops to cluster together as shown in Figure 12 on page 71.A.

Evidence of this clustering is observed in the 80's where apparel shops are heavily concentrated.<sup>1</sup> Home furnishings shops are concentrated in the Northeast, food stores to the North, and eating places around the 72nd Street district. This demonstrates the breaking down of the neighborhood shopping which probably once existed and the growth of regional patterns of shopping. It possibly stems from the restriction of shopping areas to certain streets such as Broadway, and the inability to redistribute shops in smaller units closer to the source of demand.

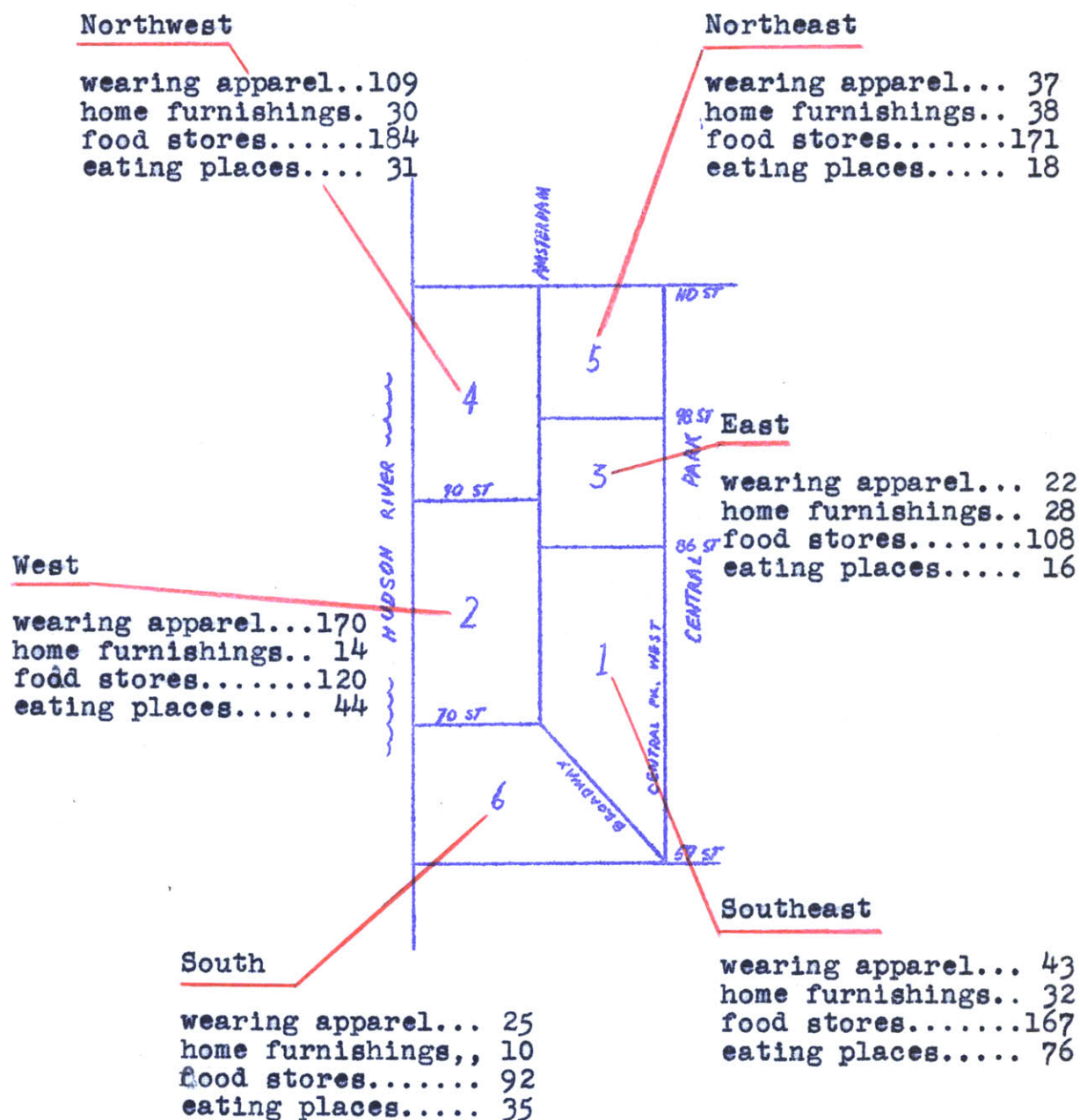
Where once, the thousands of people required to support a grocery store were found within a four block radius, they can now be found in a two block radius. It is economically possible to have the stores closer to the people who buy there. What is the effect of this not happening?

---

1. Consolidated Edison Field Survey of the NYC market, 1944.

DISTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS TYPES OF SHOPS  
IN THE RIVERSIDE AREA, 1944.

FIGURE 12



Source: Consolidated Edison Field Survey of the  
New York City Market, 1944.

Has the neighborhood quality of shopping deteriorated? Or has the result been simply the expansion of the area of competition, lower prices for all, and more choice in buying?

These questions are not easy to answer. Businessmen complain that dollar volume is falling off. At the same time, the streets are undoubtedly more full of shoppers since everyone, no matter where he is going to shop, has to use the same streets. Is this congestion? If the shopping was broken down in levels more consistent with the types of shopping done, would the simple street congestion be relieved?

What would happen to the total picture, for example, if some neighborhood types of stores were opened on West End Avenue or even on Riverside Drive where none exist today? Would that help relieve congestion and give the middle income groups their own facilities, or would it only serve to further depress property values in the area? These are questions with which any study of community facilities must deal.

In essence, the position suggested here is the testing of the validity of the neighborhood theory, but without the segregation of such units as generally described. Should facilities be as close to the people as is consistent with convenience and economic operation? The

theory has it that living conditions would be more satisfactory; from the point of departure of this study, congestion would be relieved.

Facilities non-existent:

When a child finishes grammar school (or junior high school as the case may be), he or she goes to high school. In Riverside there is no such institution for general studies. The thousands of youngsters travel outside of Riverside for this important part of their education. Their association with Riverside diminishes; their feelings for the area may diminish as well.

The lack of a high school has been noted from time to time by various civic groups in Riverside. The need for it is vaguely felt; the gaps it would fill in the life of the community are only vaguely understood. Study on this aspect of community facilities is of course difficult. Perhaps the case history of a young woman residing in the area will suggest some fruitful techniques:<sup>1</sup>

Miss B is now a senior at Hunter College. She is from an upper middle income family, and lives with her parents on West End Avenue in an elevator apartment building.

- 
- I. The young woman in question became interested in the present study as a result of which she attended the conference mentioned in the history. It, the history, was developed after many talks on various aspects of the situation in Riverside, and only the pertinent parts are recorded here.



She intends to get married and live outside the city. She has no intention of staying in Riverside. In fact, staying in Riverside after marriage never occurred to her. She was involved in nothing in Riverside.

Her reasons for this (on further inquiry) concern her friends who are not living in the area. None of her friends who are now married have stayed in Riverside. One of them lived in Riverside for a time in a furnished room, but has since moved away.

She has no ties in Riverside. She used to belong to a young peoples group in a Temple, but no longer does so. Most of her friends today were met in an out of town college including those who live in Riverside today.

Recently, this young woman, as part of a course of study, attended a conference on the intergration of Puerto Ricans, and became involved in an action program as a result. She found herself on an executive board of a committee, found that she actually was a part of the community which surprised her rather pleasantly.

On the possibility that the lack of a high school education drew her further away from the area, she felt that perhaps it did, but the fact that she went to an out-of-town college was even more important.

On reading an early draft of this paper, however, and noting that the absence of a high school in Riverside was not mentioned, she insisted that it be included as an important aspect.

This case history, sketchy though it is, reflects the possibility that much is being lost to the community through the lack of facilities for young people. Perhaps even the inclusion of a university in Riverside is not too much to expect. Not all the young people would go to the high school and the university if they were in Riverside. But it is not too much to expect that those institutions would provide much needed facilities. The young people would have the chance to belong to and help

their communities to grow and develop.

These aspects too should be studied, the facilities which are not there, the non-existent facilities.<sup>1</sup> What is the effect on the community when they are lacking? How much have their lack contributed to the growth of congestion, apathy, malaise, and disinterest of Riverside dwellers? How much does it cost the area in terms of decline, deterioration, and loss of better educated, better equipped, and more useful citizens?

Basic congestion hypothesis:

Though 89% of those interviewed in elevator apartments liked their individual accommodations, only 27% liked living there.<sup>2</sup> No matter how fine the apartment, if community facilities are not available, and if contact with undesirable neighbors is necessary, there will be little satisfaction with living conditions. Building newer and better apartments cannot be expected to solve some of the most vexing tenant problems. Only a thorough study and solution of problems pertaining to the

- 
1. Perhaps a number of interviews especially designed to get the future outlook of young people who grow up in Riverside would be helpful. What is the point at which they lose contact with their area, lose feeling for it, and develop new ideas, new futures. How do they lose their present reality.
  2. On the basis of 44 interviews in six and nine story apartment houses. AIA "Patterns of Urban Congestion" Reports.

community at large can raise satisfaction to a desirable level.

Fragmentary though this discussion of community facilities has been, throughout runs a thread of common quality. The underlying implication is that where facilities are inadequate to meet needs, satisfaction is at a low level. Similarly, the simple existence of a multitude of facilities does not necessarily mean that they can or do effectively supply the required need. In fact, in Riverside, the effective use of community facilities is becoming progressively more difficult.

At today's increased density, requirements for neighborhood facilities can be satisfied in smaller areas than previously. Neighborhood areas which can support community facilities are smaller. Some facilities can therefore be placed in smaller packages. But the space allotted to community facilities is relatively fixed. The result has been the emergence of neighborhoods either without community facilities or whose facilities are in other areas. They are lacking in the former case, and ineffective in the latter. This is the hypothesis to be tested through further study.

## CHAPTER IV

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RIVERSIDE

As a general consideration, Riverside problems are those of every adequate dwelling area: almost nowhere in the city are there communities whose housing is completely adequate. Somewhere in its boundaries are sub-standard dwellings. The problem facing these communities is the following: To maintain the areas in which good housing exists, to find new housing for those living in sub-standard conditions, and finally to correct those substandard conditions, in that order.

To date we have put the cart before the horse, perhaps with some justification. Our energies have been concentrated on replacement of slum dwellings first, development of new housing second, and only incidentally on the maintenance of adequate dwelling areas. The only justification of this reversed procedure was the almost complete sub-standard nature of entire areas. Today, we stand on different ground.

Throughout this paper, the major desire has been to acquaint the reader with the problems in the maintenance of Riverside. As a hypothesis, nothing in this paper can be considered as a conclusion. But the way in which Riverside has been viewed is strongly recommended

to civic leaders, planners, and housers who would better conditions in Riverside.

Puerto Ricans are not the problem in Riverside. It is not the presence of Negroes, or the presence of low income families. It is not even the presence of sub-standard dwelling. As has been shown, the greatest increases of population come to the better areas and not the worst ones. Good residential districts are abandoned by middle income groups, they are not forced out of them.

We have tried to make the basic problems clear. The first step in solving them is to understand what they are.

Roughly put, they are as follows:

1. Holding down the population and its changed characteristics to a point where they can be adequately handled.
2. Maintaining dwellings of adequate standards which will satisfy the types of people the community serves.
3. Develop community facilities as close to the people in the neighborhood who use them as possible (consistent with economy).

In order to hold down the population to reasonable levels, it may be necessary to move some people out of Riverside. Where can new areas for housing be found when the community is 100% built up? Why not find

some other area as a satellite town for Riverside?<sup>1</sup> An area where families could be rehoused in adequate, reasonably priced dwellings. Such an area would be an escape valve for the extraordinary pressures in Manhattan. The city could even provide an area where Riversiders would have preference in getting adequate dwellings. Perhaps several such areas in different parts of the city would be worthwhile to consider. For until some flexibility is again introduced into the Riverside community structure, it will be difficult if not impossible to maintain it.

Money must be continuously spent in keeping up the standard of housing. Investment in new buildings, creation of new required facilities, and adequate maintenance of existing structures are all required. But there was only a small amount of new building in the last twenty years. Maintaining a decent standard of dwelling was complicated by the rapidly changed needs of tenants.

Reserves in the form of the inherent flexibility of buildings was called into action. Conversions became the

---

1. This suggestion was first made by Charles Abrams to a group of young people planning the redevelopment of Harlem. As an idea, it parallels the satellite towns of London, but there is no reason why it should not be extended to such large population groups as Harlem and Riverside. Many smaller aggregations have used that device.

common method of dealing with changed dwelling needs. There is no doubt about the efficiency of this method. Almost any type of building can be changed to meet almost any need. But there can be a logic to this change, an understanding of the type of change which will maintain an adequate area. How did Riverside handle conversion:

1. Did the conversion increase or decrease the possibility of further investment?
2. Did the conversion lead to better maintenance?
3. Did the conversion enhance or reduce the desirability of the area for middle income groups (such as families with children)?
4. Did the conversion make community facilities more or less accessible?

If conversions pass these and other tests, then they are probably justified. But, as we have shown, there is a strong possibility that Riverside conversions for the most part have violated most of the set conditions. They have reduced the possibility of further investment, increased population to the point of congestion, and made the area impossible for families with children.

In the Northwest area, conversions which are not legal, which amounts to the taking in of lodgers, or to rooming-house-apartment operation, are the rule. The effects of

this kind of adjustment is even less desirable. Succeeding slices of the Northwest area are being abandoned by middle income groups.

The study of the use of buildings in the area is certainly indicated. Changes in enforcement procedures, perhaps even in the laws themselves, will probably be necessary to insure effective, non-detrimental conversion practises.

While conversion of structures may ease the impact of rapidly changing types of tenancy, it does not meet the requirements of adequate dwelling for upper and middle income groups. New investment is constantly necessary to replace obsolete structures, but there has been little of this activity in Riverside lately. With the exception of Schwab House, in 1950, there has not been a new development of any size in Riverside for twenty years. Real estate interests are timid. They know the types of buildings which are now required, but apparently do not have the strength of conviction or the confidence in the area to build them.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. One real estate man outlined to this author a plan for apartments for young people to rent at \$50 to \$75 per month. It was to be a tower development. He had no idea of beginning such a project, but he "...had often thought about it".



Replacement of brownstones, is long overdue. The last of these dwellings should have disappeared. They remain, not only because they are returning a profit, but because the market for apartment houses hit its peak in the 1920's, and has since been glutted. Soon, however, the brownstones will be unacceptable to adult families. Apartment houses are rapidly being converted to meet their needs. At the very least, brownstones should be considered once again for reconversion for families with children.

Finally, in order to have an adequate residential area, the tenants of that area must be satisfied with the conditions outside the dwelling. They are certainly not satisfied in Riverside. Not only the apartment, but the daily chores and pleasures of living must be considered as part of housing:

1. Is there a continuous overcrowding of facilities?  
Are there enough of them? Of all kinds?
2. Are community facilities available close to  
where they are needed? Or does one cross  
Broadway to get there?
3. Is there a definite feeling of community?  
How many friends do tenants have in the area?
4. How many of its young people want to raise  
families in Riverside?

These and like questions can be asked of Riversiders. The answers won't be encouraging. They may be even less so after a comprehensive study of the housing situation in Riverside is completed.

When an adequate study of the area is made, the point of decision will be reached. It will then be known just what changes in population are taking place. It will be known how these various family compositions are being accommodated. It will be known how available and adequate their facilities are. At that point, housers and civic leaders will have to decide the following things:

1. Which kinds of population to encourage, and what is the composition which Riverside can most adequately serve.
2. How should the use of dwellings be adjusted to meet this need. Which areas will be developed for what kinds of tenants.
3. What changes in community facilities will be made. What additions, deletions, and where will they be located.

These decisions should be based on an objective presentation of alternatives made by professional planners. No one else is prepared to discuss objectively the various uses to which Riverside property can be put effectively. Under no circumstances should the presentation

of alternatives be left to Riversiders whether they are civic leaders, voters, or real estate men. The alternatives can be competently presented only by those who have no vested interest in life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, or property in Riverside.

Conclusion: If Civic leaders and housers are really interested in improving Riverside life, they will try and find out exactly what effect the changed and increased population is having on the dwellings and community facilities in the area. Professional planners will be invited to participate in the development of plans. Finally, they will take vigorous action to make Riverside a desirable place to live.